

# DANCE OF THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

An Entertainment of the  
Imagination

by

SACHEVERELL  
SITWELL



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To  
GEORGIA AND TRAJAN  
17 September 1935



# CONTENTS

## I. A PICTURE OF THE PRESENT page 17

*The sound of London—Gin and Slum—The New Age—The Sicilian façade—An age of understatement—Solarium for parlour—Pablo Picasso—Pierrot Lunaire—Strawinsky—Salvador Dali—Joan Miró—The age of leisure—The high mountains—A mountain Arcadia—Nearness of Italy—A pastoral Kingdom—The Auricula—Envoi.*

## II. THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH (AFTER THE PICTURE BY BRUEGHEL) page 31

*Apocalyptic—The landing on the shore—The gallows-tree—The wheelwright—Impaled—The Knacker's mare—Cheap death—The Midwife.*

## III. PARADISO page 43

### 1. Four groups of nudes: page 45

(i) *The Bathing Pool, Play of Light—The diving board—Water drama.* (ii) *Chorus, To the Sacrifice—No background—The frame-story.* (iii) *Hortus Conclusus—During the Black Death—Do not wake them!* (iv) *The Lily Tank, Masks of Jasmine—Black lotus—Lioness.*

### 2. Episodes of Gilles: page 59

*A preluding of the nerves—The agony of the nerves—Popular music—Pierrots on the sands—Pains of waiting—Instant of meeting—An antidote to dying—Entrance of Gilles—Gilles, as Watteau himself—An introduction to artifice—Watteau in the theatre—Character of Gilles and meaning of his mask—Nozze di Figaro—The Letter Song—l'Embarquement pour la Cythère—The Italian air—Il Barbiere di Siviglia—John Field—Chopin—Schumann—Fantasiestücke—Silence and Insanity—Deburau—Carnaval.*

### 3. The Masked Ball: page 90

*Le Spectateur nocturne—The Ballroom—The Gallery of yews—The Slieve Bloom Mountains—Leap Castle—The rush-strewn floor*

## CONTENTS

—Jackdaw Princesses—Falling of the Masks—The Three Travesties of Gavarni—The white damson—The Shannon—Culdees—The great Skellig—Lamaseries—Hermits of Lake Tana—African wonders—The cauldron of the storm—The plain of Tipperary—The ghost upon the stepping stones—The bed of watercress—A place of waiting—Le Lac des Cygnes—Scherzo of Tchaikowsky's. Fourth Symphony—Embodiment of the moment—Portrait—Coral atoll—Maori—More bird men—Feather mantles—War cloaks—Carriion men—Hunting the Moa—The roc's egg—The Armada, or shoal of maidens—They climb on board—The conch shell—Statues on the shore—The second Escorial—The masqued ball—The three phantoms of the ballroom—The unmasking—Truth out of the eyes—Death masks—Galop Final.

### IV. THE BANQUET, OR CENACOLO page 179

Krishna and the milkmaids—Indians of Ajanta—Towers of Jasmine—Divine and profane Love—The elephant—Concepts of life and death—The Blue Bodhisattva—Morning—Interior scene—Buddha and Krishna—The Indian Pagoda—The Banks of Ganges—The burning Ghats—Cremation of the living—The Abbey of Magadha—Arrival of the Persians—Khosru upon the rock face—The Banquet—Anchorites of the Arctic—The School of repose—Sacred Ballerinas—Gog and Magog—The supper at Louveciennes—Portrait of Louis XV—The guillotine—Hetairae of the Empire—Portrait of Dubarry—Relevance of these tyros—The hour of hydromel—Dying, dying, dead.

1. 'Dumb tones, and shuddering semitones of Death!' page 221  
Ghosts of the tragic evening—They touch but have no contact—Dramatis Personae—The milliner's shop—Dante Gabriel Rossetti—Afflatus—The Three Phantoms of Miss Siddal—The inexpressible phantom—Anti-crinoline—Interruption—The cup of laudanum—Death and the Virgin—Ghosts.

2. The Goldberg Variations: page 251  
A symphony of clocks—Tompion in his clock shop—Noises of the night—The Variations—The workshop of Bach—Tones of the harpsichord—Potsdam—The Giant grenadier—Background of Bach—The case of Johann Jacob Schuebler—The Marienkirche of Lübeck—Buxtehude—The Fugal Universe.

## CONTENTS

3. Ballet (dedicated to the muse of Tchaikowsky): page 277  
*Overture—Mazurka solennelle—Entry of Prince Charming—La Fée Dragée—The Five Variations—Pas de Trois—Mime—The Stairway and the Four quarters of the World—The cloudy kingdom—The muse of Tchaikowsky—Mime in music—Doctor Coppélius—Airs of Mime—The Adagio—The practice room—Piazza di Spagna—La Dormeuse de Naples—Subiaco—The Elysian Fields—The Ecossaise—The hundred travesties—Living in illusion—Last Act—Grande Valse—Grande Adagio—The spectre at the window—The dancers descend into life—Out into the street.*

4. Edmund Kean and the Spangled Drama—"To see Kean act is like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning."—COLERIDGE.

page 313

*Bow Bells—The doorstep—Black-eyed Cupid—To sea—His foster-mother—Kean as Harlequin—Theatrical Fame—Red Indian—Dead—The ghost of Drury Lane—Spangled prints—The little chimney sweep—Greenacre—Titles of plays—A theatrical costumier's—Scenery—Cruikshank or Sharaku—Harlequinade—Nightmare chase—Kean as Hamlet—The Midwife again—Fall of the curtain.*

### V. PURGATORIO page 339

1. The Hood-Beak, or the Silent System: page 341  
*The locking of the doors—Subterranean—Symbol of the Three Rooms—The Rev. Daniel Nihil—Bull ring—The Hood-Beak—Sisyphus and the leaden stone—Corridor—At worship—Masked Vestals—Forms of the Hood-Beak—The Dantesque circle—The Frosted window—Juggernaut—Ronde Infernale.*

2. Transportation. Mudie's Place, Port Arthur, Port Macquarie and Point Puer: page 357  
*Into the Pit—Crossing the sea—Black Swans—Terra Firma—The centipede—Mudie's Place—Marsyas and the satyrs—The sensation—The Sketa—The monster Pearce—Red Rain—Van Diemen's Land—The Styx—Cerberus—The Constables—Prometheus in Trumpet Irons—On the wet rocks—The Juvenile Academy.*

3. Norfolk Island: page 379  
*Parkland—First arrivals—Fourteen hundred convicts in double irons—Warder McChuskey—The casting of the dice—Archbishop Ulla-*

## CONTENTS

*thorne—The Augean Stable—Prisoners of the Plain—The kitchen  
mutiny—Pitcairners—The Janissaries—The Constable of Castile.*

### VI. INFERNO (IN THE MANNER OF HIERONYMUS BOSCH)

page 395

*Phantoms of the Dead—The Egg Birth—Tirelres et Coffres-forts  
—Inferno of the Drolls—Adam and Eve—Monstrous Images—Les  
Culs de Jatte—Iconography of Bosch—The Burgundian Plain—  
Diableries—Images of the Subconscious—The Wind of the Inferno  
—The Snail Shell—Red Dolomites—Envoi.*

## ILLUSTRATIONS

- A DRAWING BY BARNETT FREEDMAN *on the title-page*
- AUGUST IN LONDON, FROM CRUIKSHANK'S 'COMIC ALMANACK', 1836 *page 2*
- THE KNACKER'S YARD, BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK, FROM 'THE ELYSIUM OF ANIMALS', BY EGERTON SMITH, 1836 *page 32*
- THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH, BY BRUEGHEL *to face page 34*  
*Madrid: Prado. Anderson photo*
- THE CHAPEL, ON THE SEPARATE SYSTEM, IN PENTONVILLE PRISON, FROM MAYHEW AND BINNY, 'THE CRIMINAL PRISONS OF LONDON', 1862 *page 42*
- GRIMALDI AND HARLEQUIN, BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK, FROM 'LIFE OF GRIMALDI', BY 'BOZ', *i.e.* CHARLES DICKENS, 1837 *page 44*
- LE GRAND GILLES, BY WATTEAU *to face page 66*  
*Paris: Louvre. Giraudon photo*
- HEAD OF DEBURAU *to face page 88*  
*Paris: Musée Carnavalet. Photograph by Nadar*
- TRAVESTISSEMENT, BY GAVARNI, FROM 'LA MODE', 1831, PLATE 119 *to face page 102*
- THE MOA, FROM 'BIRDS OF NEW ZEALAND', 1886 *to face page 150*
- TRAVESTISSEMENT, BY GAVARNI, FROM 'LA MODE', 1831, PLATE 116 *to face page 168*
- TRAVESTISSEMENT, BY GAVARNI, FROM 'LA MODE', 1831, PLATE 121 *to face page 172*
- LE GALOP FINAL, BY DAUMIER *to face page 176*
- THE MOVING CIRCUS, BY THEODORE LANE, FROM PIERCE EGAN, 'THE SHOW FOLKS', 1831 *page 178*
- SKELETON OF THE MOA, FROM 'BIRDS OF NEW ZEALAND', 1886 *page 180*
- A SEATED WOMAN, FROM A WALL-PAINTING AT AJANTA, FROM J. GRIFFITH'S 'AJANTA', 1896 *to face page 188*

## ILLUSTRATIONS

- FESTIN CHEZ LA DUBARRY À LOUVECIENNES, BY MOREAU LE  
JEUNE *to face page 210*  
*Paris: Louvre. Giraudou photo*
- AUDIENCE LEAVING A THEATRE IN THE RAIN, BY THEODORE  
LANE, FROM PIERCE EGAN, 'THE LIFE OF AN ACTOR',  
1825 *page 220*
- STREET SCENE, BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK, FROM C. M. WEST-  
MACOTT, 'POINTS OF MISERY', 1823 *page 250*
- PLATE OF PERSPECTIVE FROM SCHUEBLER'S 'PERSPECTIVA RES  
PICTURAE' *to face page 264*
- VEILED FEMALE PRISONER, AT THE SURREY HOUSE OF CORREC-  
TION, WANDSWORTH, FROM MAYHEW AND BINNY, 'THE  
CRIMINAL PRISONS OF LONDON', 1862 *page 276*
- NOVEMBER IN LONDON, FROM CRUIKSHANK'S 'COMIC  
ALMANACK', 1836 *page 336*
- MALE CONVICT, AT PENTONVILLE PRISON, FROM MAYHEW  
AND BINNY, 'THE CRIMINAL PRISONS OF LONDON',  
1862 *page 338*
- INTERIOR OF THE SURREY HOUSE OF CORRECTION, WANDS-  
WORTH, WITH THE PRISONERS TURNING OUT AFTER  
DINNER, FROM MAYHEW AND BINNY, 'THE CRIMINAL  
PRISONS OF LONDON', 1862 *to face page 344*
- PRISONERS AT EXERCISE, BY GUSTAVE DORÉ, FROM W. B.  
JERROLD, 'LONDON', 1872 *to face page 350*
- DECEMBER IN LONDON, FROM CRUIKSHANK'S 'COMIC ALMA-  
NACK', 1837 *page 356*
- ADULT SCHOOL IN THE CHAPEL, ON THE SEPARATE SYSTEM,  
AT THE SURREY HOUSE OF CORRECTION, WANDSWORTH,  
FROM MAYHEW AND BINNY, 'THE CRIMINAL PRISONS OF  
LONDON', 1862 *to face page 374*
- FEMALE CONVICTS AT WORK, DURING THE SILENT HOUR, IN  
BRIXTON PRISON, FROM MAYHEW AND BINNY, 'THE  
CRIMINAL PRISONS OF LONDON', 1862 *to face page 380*
- HOBART TOWN CHAIN GANG, FROM ERIC GIBB, 'CONVICT  
LIFE IN TASMANIA', 1889 *page 391*



## ILLUSTRATIONS

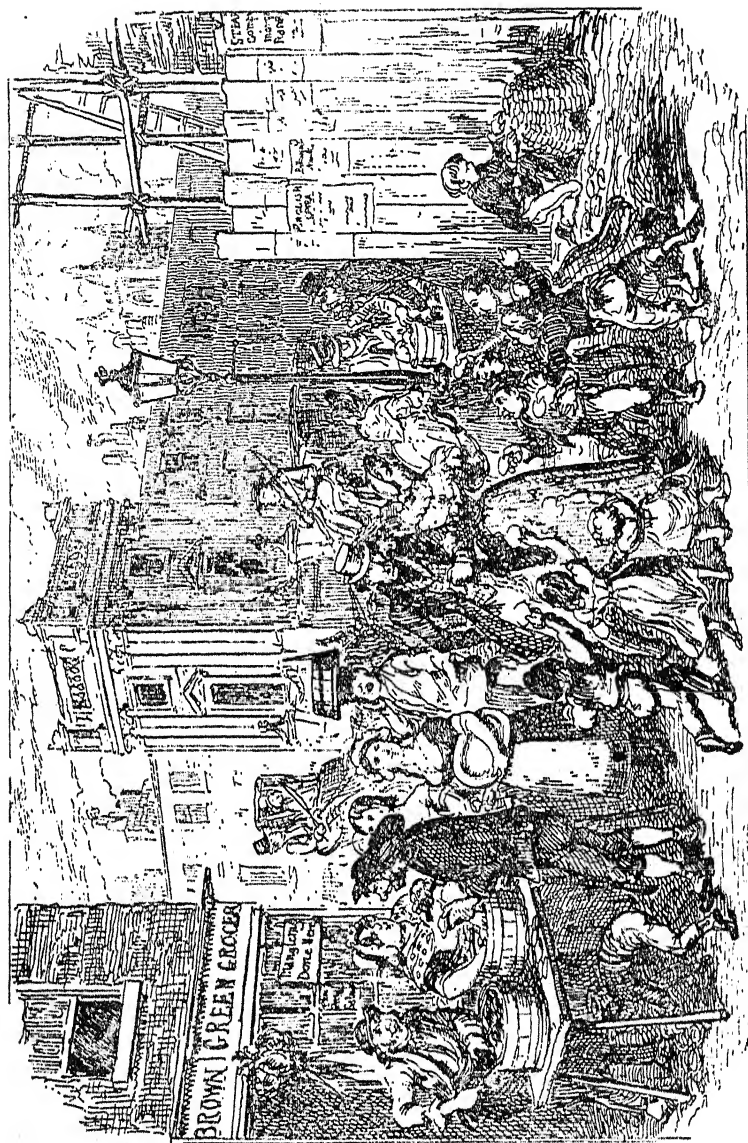
CONVICTS EXERCISING, IN PENTONVILLE PRISON, FROM MAY-  
HEW AND BINNY, 'THE CRIMINAL PRISONS OF LONDON',  
1862 *page 394*

THE INFERNO, BY HIERONYMUS BOSCH *to face page 396*  
*Escorial. Anderson photo*

GRIMALDI'S LAST SONG, BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK, FROM  
'LIFE OF GRIMALDI', BY 'BOZ', *i.e.* CHARLES DICKENS,  
1837 *page 408*



# A PICTURE OF THE PRESENT



George Cruikshank

## A PICTURE OF THE PRESENT

Before this book begins, the contemporary scene has to rise before us, lit by the lights of summer. It is a picture of the present. A morning when metal is too hot to touch, when the pavement is too hot to tread. But, as would be true of any day in history, this is the play at its best. We are so accustomed, by now, to be surrounded in our lives by the stolen images from other ages that it scarcely dawns upon us that this will be the only age we shall ever see with our own eyes. All the past died in the year of our birth. Let us look at this present, then, as if it is about to die!

Such a picture has but seldom been achieved; and never, perhaps, since it was essayed by Baudelaire in *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne*, his study of Constantin Guys. It is seventy years since that was written; and, in the meanwhile, two generations have crumbled into dust. The lost elegancies of that age are as remote from us as the farthingale of Queen Elizabeth. For objects that are just removed from the touch of our hands are much more distant than things that could never by any temporal possibility have come within our reach.

This will be the difficulty, to take the moment. It has so much life in it. And our eyes have its images so constantly upon them that it is scarcely possible to rely entirely upon their evidence. A photograph will not be enough; or there would never be need for more than that. But that invention, which was the curse of art, is, also, its salvation. Just because the surface of life is so easy, so transparent, it has become more important to look into the depths.

But the present lies in our hands. Its breath is on our cheeks.

## THE SOUND OF LONDON

A morning when metal is too hot to touch, when the pavement is too hot to tread. All the contemporary world lies open to us; the streets are thronged, and there is not even enough wind in the still air to shake the flags upon the skyline. For it is June, in the streets of shops.

London has the most true-sounding name for a city that has ever been invented. It contains in it the rumbling of a million wheels, of a million wheels rolling into the town across the bridges. It is the very sound of traffic; and the hubbub and the roar seem, in the sound of it, to be moving in a fog. It is like a pall to cover and deaden the confusion, and we know by instinct that the great and vast body of it can never be seen in its entirety, but only, as it were, wheel by wheel, street by street. That is the old London, the London described in identical terms of horror by such different minds as Dostoevsky and Verlaine. It is the gas-lit London. This is London, burning in its lights; but lit, now, by the light of summer.

The city that used to numb the perceptions of all who saw it has now assumed some qualities that are lost in its name. It is no longer the city. The sound of it has altered. Part of the old sound was the treading of the millions of hooves, the dumbness of the beasts of burden, and, even, their unconscious expectation of the knacker's yard. But now, the ways of escape are open. There is no one who has not the means of speed at his command; and, because of that, the old hubbub has dropped its defences. Its ancient walls were impenetrability, and the long way to its heart.

But our picture of this present must keep to its contingencies. Its purposes are to be achieved by contrast. It has to celebrate a summer day. We are allowed, in our lives, enjoyment of the things that cannot be taken away from us, but the other pleasures are denied to us, unless we rob the past. This is a defect of the imagination; and it is because of such a deficiency in our time that this book is called an entertainment of the imagination. For the industrial age, of the horrors of which Dostoevsky

## GIN AND SLUM

and Verlaine were witness, is dead. Even the slums have begun to die.

The age of leisure has arrived, the waiting while the machines run. Yet this leisure, like the 'over hours' of a century ago, to which the age of industry began, has come in with starvation. It is not leisure to be left standing idle. The slums were built when men, women and children had to slave; and when gin was the only recreation. Gin was the pleasure of the slums. And these are two more words which show the imaginative force of our language. Could any word in any other language be a better description of this age-old horror? The word slum has the darkness, the dirty walls, the foul mud, the stinking air, the obscene words, and even the very lurch of drink in it. But, now, every single one of these ingredients of horror is dying, slowly and separately. Even gin, itself, which used to be almost an obscene word upon the lips of anyone but the slum-dwellers, has, now, become trivialized into silliness. It is no longer a name of terror, but only one of many ingredients for silly and harmless chatter. The Gin Lane of Hogarth has fallen into dust. Its nightmare lodgers are no more to be found.

Even drunkenness is dying. There is no longer a drunken soldier or sailor, every night at the corner of every street. We are told that they prefer to sit in the canteen, eating chocolates and sweets. But our age of enforced leisure, while it has dropped one set of perils, has taken on another. Its new dangers are the innocuous and the invertebrate. In one form or another they menace nearly every moment of existence. They are implicit in the voices that call to us from the hoardings; in the convenient tones of the wireless news; and in the voices of the cinema, which, now they tend to become more English and less American, are losing even the original crudity that gave them their unreal vitality. An increasing insipidity invades every publicity of life, and the individual is so intruded upon at every turn that he can scarcely be considered any more as a separate unit. He is part of a permanent and compulsory audience; as little able to

## GIN AND SLUM

leave his place as if he was, in actual fact, tied down to the fixed seats of the picture house.

If we say that he has to be an enforced spectator, whether he likes it or not, of the most debased theatrical convention there has ever been, we are taking into account not only the actual recreation of his idle hours, but, also, all the paraphernalia of his pleasures. Serialized crime, and the social column are, alike, manifestations of this same impulse, to be always in the audience. It might be argued that the manner in which acts of violence are treated in the newspapers fulfils the same purpose that is always brought forward as an excuse for the Spaniards and their bull fights. The shedding of blood in public is said to be the emotional outlet that makes the Spaniards kind to their children in the home. But it is by daily injections that the insidious poison spreads itself into the veins; and the mass of the population are, by now, so drugged that the process of education, if it ever comes, will have to begin in all the difficulties of a population trained to evil ways.

With the increase of knowledge, it is chiefly the things that have been taken away from us that must be restored. That they existed in the past, and that their effect upon men was general and profound, is of such universal truth that the proofs of it lie at the back of even the meanest intelligence. Yet it is not the past that must be recreated: it is past opportunities that must be offered us again. The pleasures of an older world must be adapted to our needs.

It is not only the industrial age that is dead: the age of experiment, also, is dying, and we are approaching, if we ever arrive at it—the age of achievement. By now, we should have found the forms that satisfy us. The history of the past teaches us that art is not ceaseless experiment; it is perpetual renewal and constant practice. The great men worked outside the rules; the lesser men worked within them, and, keeping to the niceties of grammar, were able to produce all those secondary masterpieces by which our age is put to shame. This is the secret, for



## THE SICILIAN FAÇADE

instance, of the small Georgian house. Our necessity is for a grammar that will enable our own needs to take such easy and effortless shapes of comfort and content. These are not great talents: they are the competence of correct minds.

By contrast, the interior decoration of our houses has become an understatement of their inmates. This has never happened before, except in the silliness of the Trianon. Not, of a certainty, in the massive respectability of the Victorian home; with its mahogany sideboards, its rococo fire grates, and in the curious betrayal of deep private feeling in the draped tables, the railed-in areas, and in their insistence upon, at least, semi-detachment. Neither is this understatement to be found in the previous century, except, as we have said, in those mock pastorals. All the emphasis, on the contrary, is upon the importance of the inhabitants. This is stressed in the solidity of the porches and in a hundred interior details of plaster and woodwork. The eighteenth century calculated to display its householders to their best advantage.

The same truth might be argued of every other epoch, from the assurance of wealth that is expressed in the houses of Holland to the flaunting coxcombry of the Elizabethans. Perhaps the most extreme instance of overemphasis is to be seen in some of the settecento towns in Sicily. Cities like Modica or Ragusa, or Noto, all of which were rebuilt in entirety after an earthquake in 1693, so that they form a complete panorama of the rococo style, are overemphasized to the extent that they consist of nothing but façades. Beautiful wrought-iron balconies, supported upon stone consoles that are carved to represent mermaids, tritons, negro slaves, kneeling Turks in huge turbans, or even winged horses, are a parade of importance that is only intended for the passer-by. For, inside these palaces, there is nothing at all. In this sense it is the most unselfish display, because the palace-dwellers must have ruined their fortunes for the sake of the spectator. Except on the way to Mass, it is probable that they never came out of their palaces. And yet, from the point of

## AN AGE OF UNDERSTATEMENT

logic, it is as if they had intended to spend as much of their lives out of doors as do the summer population of Juan-les-Pins.

If we come back from such strained conditions of display to the understatement that is implicit in every phase of life for a flat-dweller, or the tenant of a maisonette, it is to admit that the only parallel to his humility existed in the ghettos of oriental towns, where, the richer the Jew, the more afraid he was to display his wealth. There is no other spiritual parallel for such lives of abnegation in an age when all knowledge is at our feet. The trajectory of this fall in self-esteem has been dramatic and abrupt in the lives of the last two generations, as we can see by comparing the flats and the cheap houses of to-day with the villas of Maida Vale or St. John's Wood and the stucco'd terraces of Paddington or South Kensington. Certainly a search for beauty was no part of that solidity, but it indicated, at least, some deeper degree of good faith. The Englishman was only happy in his home behind solid walls and plate windows. This was the bargain between the public and the supplier; and, in order to make the houses more readily attractive, the builder had to exaggerate these attributes. It is, also, to be noticed that the similarity of these rows of houses was calculated to flatter the Englishman's dread of being singled out for particular notice. This must be a psychological trait for which our school system is responsible. Singularities of dress or speech make life a burden for their unfortunate possessors. Readers of Trollope will remember the agony of mind undergone by schoolboys if their sisters came down to the school. These traits of nervousness were retained all through life; and, as soon as he married, we may imagine the typical city man of the period choosing his home well in the centre of a row of houses rather than risk the singularity of either end of a terrace.

The full weight of monotony in these conditions of Victorian London has driven our contemporary into a flat or into the country, along the arterial roads. This is partly in order to retain his mobility, for he will spend as much upon his motor

## SOLARIUM FOR PARLOUR.

car, or motor bicycle, as upon his house. When the motor car is old he exchanges it for another, equally or more expensive. The defiance of weather conditions that is made so easy by the luxury of transport in his daily journeys in omnibus or tube, together with the fact that he is probably living at week-end distance all through the week, combine to make a fictitious summer for him. The kernel of his life is no longer the dining room or the parlour, but the solarium.

And yet, it is the unfortunate truth that these blessings of sun can never be enjoyed for more than two or three months in the year. He is living, therefore, under falsified conditions; as artificial as the instalment-system upon which he has purchased house and motor car. If suddenly called upon to do so, it would be utterly impossible for him to complete the purchase. He is living upon credit, and his lien upon an uncertain future has an equal application to every one of the visionary benefits of this new mode of living.

But, since these are the conditions, and because they can never be altered but only heightened in our lifetimes, it is a pity that this credit system, which has, already, as we have seen, destroyed the perpetual winter of Victorian London for the summer of Hollywood or the Riviera, cannot be extended in order to include more and equally fallacious pleasures. Without every conscious effort on their part, the dwellers in all great epochs of art would have found themselves in conditions of life no less degraded than our own, saving, perhaps, the pall of smoke from our factories.

The offset of a century of industry was the universal ugliness that is the commonplace of the nineteenth century. Of necessity, this had to be broken by experiment; but our age, where its higher originality is concerned, and in the hands of those who should have recovered from this malady, is a morass of experiment for experiment's sake. The public, who are the audience, and who caught up with these experiments when they had reached the stage of being worth making, are now showing

## PABLO PICASSO

signs of their disillusionment. It would be interesting, for example, to know the number of serious listeners who turn off their wireless sets if it is an evening of contemporary music. And, indeed, such a lot has been inflicted upon them in the name of modernity that their revolt must find sympathy in the minds of all true music-lovers.

The suicidal tendency of an age which submits to the spending of all its spare moneys on armaments for future immolation is, also, evidenced in such smaller ways as the deliberate methods by which painters of the advanced school have destroyed, one after another, all the channels of their ancient prestige. Landscape, in the sense in which any landscape painting is to be recognized as such from its known or natural features, has perished. So has portrait painting. There is not a living painter of real eminence who could be relied upon to produce a good portrait in these years which we have been told to look upon as one of the climaxes of European painting.

Instead, all the ingenuity and skill of practised minds have been devoted to abstract exploration. The genius of a Picasso is at home in this house of experiment. For, with the most astonishing natural equipment of any painter of the last three centuries, this great artist opens one path after another that he has no inclination to follow, and lets his imitators walk behind him into the cul-de-sac. He has never failed to extricate himself in the forty years of his career; and, while they still flounder, there is ever some new country to his credit. And yet it is true that Picasso has begun to prove a disappointment to even the most fervent of his admirers. The affirmation of his genius, and not its ceaseless coruscations might have been expected from him at nearly sixty years of age, but Picasso is evidently not a person who sobers with age. It is reasonable to suppose that he hates, more than most men, the process of growing old, and that he hides before its tendencies of regression. From his most recent pictures it is as if he is still furiously experimenting in his garret; in the mean lodging, somewhere just under the tiles, that we are to

## PIERROT LUNAIRE

assume was his first studio when he arrived in Paris from Barcelona, and starved. The lean harlequins shivering, hungry-eyed, in their spangles, are still his companions. The baraques of the fair, the mean theatres announced by the bugle, the Spaniard's guitar, are never far from even the most inventive of his abstractions. Picasso would appear to be perfecting, in his middle age, the mysteries that lay behind the more obvious realities of his early period. Then, he could only hint at them; now, he is their master, but their inspiration has fled from him. The ghosts have gone: or, at least, they are hiding in the tent and no longer come forth to the trumpet.

If he is the sole great artist of our time we should expect to find his influence already at work upon our environment. And, perhaps, it is true that he has, even now, affected the surface of visual life to an extent that is not realized, and that has never fallen to the lot of any other painter since the height of the Renaissance. This is to be seen in many unexpected ways. It is noticeable, first, in effects of economy; in posters, and even in simplified lettering, though, by this, we do not mean that detestable affectation of names above shop windows spelt out in childish, small letters, as by the fingers of a little girl. But, rather, those rounded and simplified forms, sometimes with the shadows of the letters spelling the name a second time, as though by the bevelling of their edges. It is, of course, unreasonable to suppose that such details have been influenced in a direct way by Picasso, but there is no doubt that they are the offspring of his simplifications. And, in his turn, Picasso has taken his stimulus from the very sources that are most suggestive of his effects. This can be seen wherever a new shop is building and the windows are scrawled over with scrolls and flourishes of whitewash. The writer remembers a whole new street in Copenhagen where one window after another showed these strange illusory inventions. They were like abstractions of *Le Pierrot Lunaire*, counterfeits of moonlight, of white sleeves, abstract similes of nostalgia; and, at the same time, their formula, as in certain

## STRAWINSKY

paintings by Picasso, hinted at the chairs and tables of the café, and, in order to be acquitted of sentimentality, avoided the features and drew a child-drawn mask. It was, in short, an open-air exhibition of his pictures held under the lamplight.

The protean talents of this extraordinary man, and they are at once his genius and his destruction, make the rest of contemporary painting ridiculous in contrast to his subtlety and nervous speed, while it might be argued that if he has been the inspiration of many lesser painters, and the ruin of some among them, he has, most certainly, had an effect of sheer disaster upon a great musician who cannot be absolved from having purposely dropped his own individuality in order to assume alien, cosmopolitan airs and make his epoch the age of Strawinsky and Picasso. During the fifteen years that this attempt has lasted (1920-1935) Strawinsky has not added a single thing to his serious fame. Rather, he has exhausted his admirers and tired them with platitudes. Indeed, the survival of the legend is a matter for surprise. We are so tired of his devices. There is the idiot trot into which he quickens the music: (*Symphonie des Psaumes, Violin Concerto, Pianoforte Concerto, Apollon Musagètes*;) and there is the Chinese boxing match, for the inanities of its form and speed can be indicated in no other words. If only Strawinsky had ceased to compose at the age of thirty-five how different would be his fame!

If the hegemony of Strawinsky and Picasso is upon the decline, it is probable, so far as 'advanced' art is concerned, that the age that is succeeding it will not even be linked to a famous name. It is most unlikely that this will happen while the age of experiment continues, for it is obvious that its forces are already exhausted. A world reputation such as that won by Picasso or Strawinsky can no longer be attained through those same methods. It could never have been achieved had not the public been willing, unconsciously, to be shocked. Their emotions, it may be suspected, are now of a very different order. And it is at least possible that the violence of the younger ex-

## SALVADOR DALI

perimentalists has made a static attitude untenable for their leaders. They have been driven on from behind; while the degradation of art into amateur standards, and the consequent rush of amateurs into art, who are just as competent as their professional colleagues, has made a vast phalanx of followers who are hungry for cheap sensation. It is at least certain that a considerable composer like Ravel has been much hindered and prevented by the inanities of *Les Six*, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that the Surrealist painters have had a like effect upon Picasso, who, but for their disquieting clamour, should now be painting the solid achievement of his maturity.

In spite of these strictures upon them, it has to be admitted that the Surrealist painters, in devious and subterranean directions, have, at least, added a little to the confined field of recent painting. Not only the unconscious association of objects, but topics also, of deliberate irrelevance have made their appearance in painting. In the case of Salvador Dali the execution is of unusual competence and realism so that the effect made by one of his canvases is as if an unusually full picture by Holman Hunt was, so to speak, read aloud backwards. The far-fetched imagery, the insistent anecdote of the Pre-Raphaelite, are tallied by an equal amount of pains and forethought devoted to a diametrically different purpose. In the end, if both, perhaps, are nearly negligible as works of art, there remains a curious similarity from opposite ends of the spirit.

The fantasies of Joan Miró are more accidental and less meticulous. It can, at least, be said of them that they are the improvisations of a lively mind. A form takes shape upon the canvas; and Miró helps it along with all the willingness of someone who has no definite plans. It may turn into a frog, or into some more nebulous shape in which the spectator can see anything he fancies; but the other shapes build themselves around it, and this studied absence of premeditation proceeds with the minimum of fatigue. The colour is so bright and fresh that Miró does really seem to inhabit a world that is young and untired, even if

## JOAN MIRÓ

it is lived in by unpleasant, embryonic forms. It is not the world of young children, but a world on the second day of creation, before superfluous things have been eliminated, before living creatures have found their covering of skin, while they are just the engines of life, and not its embodiment and ornament. There is little difficulty in comparing his pictures with the more far-fetched fantasies of Hieronymus Bosch. These, also, have no moral message, although this is always laid to his charge; but, the more a picture by Bosch is examined, the further it recedes into fantasy, until it becomes no longer even the illustration of some proverb, but just fantasy, pure and unrestrained. It is at this point that it connects across the centuries with the second of this pair of Catalan revolutionary painters. It was not for nothing, even if they have not studied his pictures, that Bosch is to be seen in the Prado and at the Escorial, as nowhere else. This is due to Philip II, and it is not easy to understand the predilection of this lover of Titian for these works unless they appealed to him through a sort of synthetic bigotry, by their tortuous irrelevance and doctrinal fantasy.

No one would care to prophesy that the Surrealist painters will still be studied in four hundred years' time. It will be against the tenets of their creators if they survive for as long as a decade. But, if their purpose is destructive, it will be a curious commentary upon our age that these ends had to be achieved through such remote unrealities. Mine and countermine are at such a depth that their illusory triviality will seem like the serious workings of political or religious fanatics. It will be difficult to believe that the surface of life remained so unshaken by their stratagems. Not only this, but, as all academic art is bound to perish because no one wants it, the very existence of this official parallel will be a mystery. And, indeed, its survival is already ignored by the combatants, who are much more engaged in fighting each other than in despatching their original enemy. This is an identical situation to that in the criminal underworld of the U.S.A., where the bootleggers, and the gangs who way-



## THE AGE OF LEISURE

laid and preyed upon them, hated each other more than they feared the police. The furious struggles of modern paintings are internecine and no longer directed against the apathy and ignorance of the public. But it is equally obvious that the art of the academy is, if anything, even less popular with the public.

It is, in short, impossible to resist the conclusion that we are witnessing the death agonies of experimental art. This is a very different thing from progressive art. Experimental art, by its essentials, is most suited to countries where there has never been any other art. Progressive art, which proceeds by tradition, will refuse to forget what has been learnt in twenty centuries. But its enemy is eclecticism. The cultivation of historical styles is the last impotence of our wrong understanding of tradition. It is curiously enough the amateur who, profiting by the debased standards of painting, took up that profession and lent a hand in slaying it, and can now be relied upon to save the actual background. Having fulfilled one useful service in killing a dying thing, he is, now, nursing a sick being back to life. And the cure is achieved through the simplest of remedies. Such are the virtues of colour wash against the horrors of a floral wallpaper: and such, it may be added, considering the pictures, are the virtues of restraint in hanging only one picture in a room. In fact, partly from poverty, the public are saving themselves from the architects and the decorators. And, if these want to find favour, they have to set to work in the accepted style of the amateur.

For the tides are rising. By one revolt after another all obstacles are swept away and the terrain is prepared for the pleasures of the new age—the Age of Leisure. This is no longer the sinecure of a few idle hands. It will be the universal truth. The pall of smoke is already thinning upon the trees and fields; factories have their gardens and sports grounds: working hours show a steady, if slow reduction: in nearly every profession the certainty of a pension makes the saving of money unnecessary: we are approaching the era of a static population, which will show no increase, and in which the old will predominate in

## THE HIGH MOUNTAINS

numbers over the young. The imminence of this new period is evident in all things. Its pleasures must find new shape; and, if there is to be any art at all in the future, it must expect new patrons and try to satisfy a new public.

In the certainty that this is true we propose to transfer the reader to what we believe to be the last centre in which an existing art is to be seen, not yet cobwebbed, nor crumbled into decay. As if this is not a rarity, in itself, the inhabitants of these bright valleys still wear their old costumes and are no poorer in the world through their archaic ways. In their lives they are surrounded by all the trappings of our machine age, without its defects of ugliness. Their advantages are small in scale, but so are their incomes. They must be looked upon, in fact, with some of the atmosphere of romance in which we regard the natives of a coral island, blessed with an even climate and living on the bounties of Nature.

This is not the first time that their paradise has been extolled. It was discovered, nearly two centuries ago, by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in a time of like emergency, but its frontiers have shrunk with the passage of time and it has no longer nearly its original extent. Nor will it last: it is bound to die with this generation. Even now it is more archaic in its survivals than Persia or Turkey. That is why the thought of these places should afford us some mental comfort in our impasse of the arts. For we are besieged, beleaguered, by the results of our own stupidities. All the efforts of wise men should be directed towards the raising of this siege; otherwise, like the ants, we shall become living, sentient beings, without art. The vast continent of Australia, for instance, is in this condition, now; having no art of any description whatever; never having had any; and with no possibility of ever having any in the future. But perhaps, in our own world, the force of our argument can be better expressed if we stress the simile of a siege. We are taking the reader with us, high up into rarefied air, in order that he

## THE HIGH MOUNTAINS

may experience this state of emergence. It is the last lingering of light upon the mountain tops.

If any further key, or convention, is needed for these pages, we are to conceive of a siege or an imprisonment that is no more strict and arduous than the ordinary confines of our lives, but made more emphatic by an exaggeration of the circumstances. We are to suppose that some combination of events has made it necessary to withdraw to an unwonted extent into our own imaginations. Some of the possible external pressures that would bring this about might be, a chain of disasters leading to an universal world crisis, or, in a more limited sphere, a political regime so oppressive and distasteful that it curtailed every liberty of thought, while removing the means of any form of expression. Perhaps it is better to leave the reader to fit such possibilities to his own taste, and not be any more precise, ourselves, about its details. For there is, certainly, some such shadow upon every horizon, and, once within its strictures, we should find ourselves quickly in agreement, however much we may differ, now, while it is still so distant.

It is the very essence of this situation that its barriers should be temporary; and, while we may enter into this atmosphere fearing that it may, and probably will, become worse, we have to keep up the pretence that all must be well again and that the world will go back to its normal courses once more. It is, in fact, a rarefied state of life upon which we are entering. The only other way to describe its peculiar conditions would be to liken it to the feeling of the high mountains.

First of all, there must be ubiquitous brightness. This is shed forth evenly from the zenith and does not only emanate from the sun but from every quarter of the shining heavens. Those fathomless heights ache into infinity without a single cloud upon them; and their colour, in isolation, is only to be seen in a drop of water upon blue steel, and then, only if it is held in that identical sunlight. It is only to be described, in fact, by the little reflected echo of itself. The even distribution of the light makes

## THE HIGH MOUNTAINS

every quarter of the heavens to be of equal depth, so that its immensity is proved by the utter profundity above its far distance. The sun is not hanging at the summit of the sky, at the watershed, as it were, of his own rays, but is revealed as floating midway in space so that half of his powers are lost in the blind wastes of heaven. An incredible, ineradicable blue reigns in all the aether, and the morning is as clear as diamond or as hyaline.

The air comes up the heights, fine and intoxicant, spiked with frost, while the slopes still keep the sunlight long after it has left the valleys. We are, in fact, lifted above the world, and are no longer confined within its spiritual limits. The boundaries of the material world are actually more close to us than ever before, but this is not to be known in the exaltation of that hour.

Snow has already fallen, and, far from winter being dreaded, it is just for its rigours that we have come here. These are no more harsh than a tingling of the blood. Apart from that, the snows have made a new and glittering world, clear as glass, and brightening, not fading, into distance. It is exhilarant, of electric sparkle, while the freshness and purity of this contact with the snows is as abrupt in its effects as a sudden alteration in perspective. The short winter days are drawn out into twice their length: we are ready dressed in time for the dawn, down the cloudless hours till the last lingering of light upon the peaks. The normal horizons of life are indefinitely extended by these unfamiliar surroundings, and yet this is a life confined to a few hundred yards of mountain side. It is, in fact, much more restricted than the ordinary life of every day.

We are above the region of the pine trees, in a land of great boulders. It is a wide plain, before the narrowing of the pass. The Alpine meadows stretch on every side, but their pastoral kingdom has been obliterated by the snow. It lies on the land like a siege, fulfilling, in this way, all the conditions of constraint for which we stipulated. But, by now, it is the normality of this rarefied world, every sparkle of which brings life into the veins.

We have to suggest the mode of life we mean by some such

## THE HIGH MOUNTAINS

comparison as that. It has to be the sort of confinement in which the spirit is unfettered, in which the imagination is given every encouragement and all liberty. It has to be, in some senses, a world in which the imagination is almost the only thing left, because every other method of expression has been taken away. The absence of all else, but this, has precisely that effect of altering the entire perspective of life, of abolishing all the frontiers of reality. The mind flourishes into blossom in this enforced economy. While it can dwell on memories of the past, it can also build for the future. It is to be no more than a lull, a little interval before the usual trappings of life are resumed. But this is essential, that the rarity of its atmosphere should be felt from the outset; and that is why we have compared its duration to the feeling of the high mountains. It must be an exceptional occasion, and every phase of its life must do justice to the peculiar circumstances that gave it birth.

A set of conditions has to be granted to us, that is all. We are suffering a gentle imprisonment, as on parole, in our own homes and are at liberty to move about. We have imagined a time of transition between two worlds, comparable to one of those moments of anxious silence in which scene after scene flashes through the mind; and, because of the very danger of the predicament, peaceful and idyllic hours from the long-distant past alternate with sudden visions of the present. At such moments the mind is not filled only and entirely with persons; it creates a scene or an atmosphere with equal realism, and dwells as much upon abstract things as upon personalities. The stringency of the situation has intensified the violence of its imagery. This, then, is the air we breathe, and there need be no further delay of introduction.

For the material background for this exaltation of the spirit is not difficult of access. This is one of the rare instances in which the arbitrary conditions of Nature reproduce themselves in entirety in the works of man. It gives us an excuse for mentioning some of the most delightful minor things to be found in the

## THE HIGH MOUNTAINS

whole of civilization; and the populating of these pages, once it has begun, will proceed from this easy stage into more serious projects.

Our demand for ubiquitous brightness will give us the whole scene in its proper colours. These have to be painted as if with washes of snow, keeping to those shades in which the snow might fall could it retain the colours of the Alpine sky. The lights are always of morning or evening, never of midday. They are the expression of the rarefied air of the mountains, the transparency of which derives from the slant sunlight. This comes to us broken by the hills, or suddenly, through windows in the clouds. And these sail so swiftly along the upper winds that they are never the same for long.

'The thick and the pastel snow' lies on the roofs of all the houses. Indeed every object in sight which is not the snow itself is thickly heaped and levelled with the snow. It gives romantic possibilities to every flat surface, whether it be a window ledge or the heap of timber lying in a backyard. The footprints of a bird, the tracks of any animal or of a man, are the affirmations of something so artificial upon the uniformity of snow that their reality is as capricious and fanciful as the architecture of the houses. This is varied on purpose against the monotony of winter, though its imagery is the direct outcome of the snow. It has been designed, that is to say, so as to lift its bright colours into dissonance, into a clash of discords against the winter day. Its colours are as the flames of a fire against the black of coal. For the brightness of the tints, newly painted every year, cannot be indicated in other terms than of the flame. Or it is of some substance tempered by fire; of the light and shine of china; or of Alpine meadows lit by the new flowers of spring. The wooden walls show their patterns of grain; or the walls, as well as the roof, are dressed with shingle, which is like the armour of sliced horse's hooves worn by Scythian horsemen, as described by Ovid from his exile at Tomi. Actually, a house built of shingle is so compact and close fitting that it is a domestic world in

## THE HIGH MOUNTAINS

itself, a world as complete as any to be found in fairy stories, and on this winter morning it is magical to think of the gentians and the zinnias at its windows in summer. If we complete the details of that season with a row of sunflowers as tall as the grenadiers of Frederick the Great, and with a few green or blue witch-balls, we shall have given every clue, but the actual name, of such a village.

Its secrets have a particular application to ourselves because each house in a village is an individual creation; and this, in itself, is a talisman against the hated uniformity of our lives. Their individuality has been achieved on such a modest basis of expense that it is our most direct inspiration. And it is the nearest to us, in time, of all the epochs of taste, however simple its peasant forms. Not only nearest in time, but nearest to our own needs and tastes. Its bright colours are a tonic to the senses, while the mountain air is associated in our minds with the blessings of health after the smoke of cities. Its uses and benefits, compared with most of the other circumstances of contemporary existence, make it as though a life of sensibility only lingered in the high mountains. It is as if the Ark of the arts has been carried from the flooded plains on to the slopes of Ararat. The rest of the world is submerged, and in order to survive we have to seek out the high places. Here, and only here, it is not an anachronism to inhabit a beautiful house, even if its area is no larger than that of a thatched cottage in our own dead countryside. Neither need it be old: the house may be the work of yesterday. In the villages of Bavaria and the Tyrol we can watch the utmost expansion of small incomes, laid out to advantage upon the return of simplicity and imagination. They are the natural antidote to the ills of our own conscience when the universal and careless ugliness of our own past is considered.

In order to see the niceties of such perfection it is only necessary to have walked for a few moments in the streets of Mittenwald, of Kitzbühel or of Lofer. The balconies, bright with flowers, the painted eaves of the houses, the wrought-iron

## A MOUNTAIN ARCADIA

inn signs, make villages such as these into perfect little states or republics of the arts. The individual points of each house, its character, to speak of it in a human sense, are combined and shared, so that they become the common attributes of the whole state. This, again, has its obligations to fulfil towards the individual so that the ideal citizenship is achieved. There could be no better example of correct proportion in the workings of a perfect democracy. Even religion has found its proper position in these little mountain villages. The churches do not overwhelm the houses, as in Italy or in Spain, but there are one or two small chapels more full of the bright promises of religion than its dour threats and gloomy forebodings. The interiors have the gaiety of Haydn in their pastoral rococo; while the same painters who frescoed the walls have often shared in the decoration of the façades of the houses.<sup>1</sup>

Everywhere, there is evidence that Italy is near, but the echo of it has come across the mountains. The accent is Italian, but not the syntax, nor the structure of the language. Thus, the planning of the houses is according to the Teutonic system, suited to Teutonic needs, but the decoration and adornment are derived, as it were, lyrically, as if from written descriptions of Italy, and not from direct observation. This is because their imaginations were so much in thrall to that thesaurus of architectural speech and expression.

Even local craftsmen who had been to Italy lived in a superfetation, an intoxication of its principles, so that their correct enunciation of the language was not to be expected in these remote pastoral valleys. It is like a kind of chinoiserie a pidgin-Italian in which they give voice to their conceptions of Venetian luxury or Roman grandeur; they have spent a few weeks in Italy, or read all the accounts of its splendours, and, on their return, they imitate its accents and are obsessed by its history. These little mountain communities were built, in fact, as

<sup>1</sup>Kitzbühel, for instance, had its local painter, Simon Benedikt Faistenberger (1695-1759).



## NEARNESS OF ITALY

though the artizans were read aloud to at their work in order to stimulate their imaginations. The naïveté of their minds made all sophistication impressive and wonderful to them, just as our own sophistication seeks out the most unlikely models for inspiration, as can be proved in any exhibition of modern sculpture. But the child mind of the negro is at such a safe distance from us that the influence of his sculpture can hardly affect the surface of life, while it is at least probable that the study of some mentality more akin to ourselves may work beneficially upon us, and the mountain Arcadia with which we are here concerned is no bad instance of this truth. That the inhabitants of such village are our elders in matters of this sort is a truth that no one would care to deny. It is manifest in everything that meets the eyes.

It is my contention that in our present identity there is more to be learnt by us from these little mountain towns than from the great ruins of Italy or Spain. This is because all our reliance for the future must rest upon the efforts of the individual. The patrons of life are dead: the State, the Aristocrat, and the Priest, are no longer in exercise of their functions. The ruins of their power are of no use to our ends. But there is all the wealth of inspiration in the free-hand imagination and fantasy of these mountaineers. And if it is necessary and indispensable that our age should be restored to tradition it can be done by studying this wild flower in which the best and most natural qualities of the more cultivated form can be seen untrammelled and unexaggerated. The remote ancestry of the arts cannot be so much a part of our bloodstream as this last flowering of its boughs. It is no part of my argument that the wooden chalets of the Tyrol could appear otherwise than ridiculous in the English landscape; but, in ways more oblique and indirect, so many of the modern theories of architecture and decoration can find the convincing proofs of their efficacy and truth in the simple forms, the bright colours, the individuality of these houses. It is as if their owners were determined to wear their finest suit of clothes, out of self-

## A PASTORAL KINGDOM

esteem, and as a contribution to the general gaiety and content. This is the fullest expression, in art, of a modest income, that has been possible for mankind since the thirteenth century at its height of achievement, and the fact that this is of such recent existence gives all the more encouragement to our own need for escape. Their needs are our present necessity; and, if this is so, the practice of their aims should be an indispensable part of our studies.

The meadows of this pastoral kingdom were of wide extent. They came down from the snows into the foothills. Huge pine forests and apple-green lakes enlarged its distances till the circuitous roads made one valley nearly inaccessible from another. Thus, the Bavarian Lakes were in a different world from those of the Salzkammergut; and the valleys of the Tyrol and the Vorarlberg were separated by a pass, six thousand feet in height, which was closed by snow during the winter. Differences of dialect and costume gave further variety to these separate communities so that, for instance, the Bavarian peasants were living at the opposite end of the world from the German-speaking villages of the Val de Gardena, in the Dolomites, on the farther side of the Brenner Pass, even though these districts might be no more than a hundred miles apart over the mountains. This extension of a comparatively small territory into a vast area by the natural barriers of mountain, as if a set of screens divided a great room into a number of smaller rooms, has resulted in much diversity and complexity of incident. The best proof of this lies in the delightful churches that are to be seen throughout its length and breadth. These reflect the piety of the peasant mind in a refinement of poetry with which it would scarcely have been credited. But the reasons that explain it are, firstly, their nearness to Italy, to which even the humblest of their craftsmen could descend for his training; and, secondly, the rich court of the Electors at Munich, who pressed the best French, as well as Italian talent, into their service. Finally, the genius of Mozart, coming out of the very geographical centre of this country,

## THE AURICULA

provides us with another explanation of the fertility of this expression. It is the more easily understood by us if we think of Mozart as having his origin in that world.

This, then, is the region which, in the opinion of the author, might be substituted, for some time to come, for Italy and for Spain. That it is one of the natural habitats of rococo art must not prejudice its claims in the minds of those unsympathetic to that style. It is indigenous to this region, flowering naturally and freely in this soil. Our stipulation was for a state of siege, for conditions of emergency. These demands would be fulfilled if all things subsequent to this phase of art were suffered to fall into neglect. If, by some process of refining, the dross could be sifted away, the debris of nearly two centuries would bring us by an easy transition back into the age of taste. The latest period in which it was impossible to go wrong should certainly be of interest to an age in which nothing will go right. And, even if this be the last and least of those epochs, its secrets cannot be inscrutable for evermore. They can be made to yield their method and their procedure.

There are even the remains of a lesser paradise of this nature to be found in the more humble homes of the north of England; or, more properly, in their gardens. I need only refer to the old photographs still to be seen in inns and public houses, where a group of miners or weavers, in bowler hats and wearing their Sunday best, often with a Wesleyan or Baptist minister among their number, have met together in competition at the local Auricula society. The public house was always the scene of these contests, while the inconceivable brilliance and divagation of the Auricula puts this ceremony of Sunday best upon a level with the flower festivals of Japan. For the Auricula is capable, it would seem, of endless variation. Towards the end of the eighteenth century there were many hundreds of named sorts; but the time of its greatest prosperity was the Regency, when this flower became the floral emblem, almost, of the lower middle classes. The Auricula may be said to combine the bold bars and

## THE AURICULA

stripes of the Regency period with a foretaste of Victorian primness, so that we may place the apogee of its popularity in the 'twenties and 'thirties of last century. The seedsman's lists, containing such names as Lycurgus, Lancashire hero, Prince Regent, Bang Europe, Eckersley's Jolly Dragoon, are typical of this time;<sup>1</sup> but, soon after this, the Auricula sank lower in the world and became the joy of the miners and weavers of Lancashire who have only ceased this interest—if, indeed, it has really stopped—within recent memory. As in everything else, it was only the gathering horror of the industrial age which destroyed their pastime by taking them farther from their homes to work, and by building rows of cottages for the miners to live in which were at such close quarters that it was not even possible to make room for a row or two of flowerpots. A letter in the press, of recent date, written from Middleton which used to be the capital of the Lancashire Auricula growers, describes the memories of one who passed his childhood in the town. The old handloom silk weavers of the place were not troubled with the smoke and pollution of to-day and were generally their own masters. They could, therefore, spare time during the day to walk into their gardens and attend to their Auriculas; and often to make up for time lost during the day the shuttle of the loom could be heard clicking until dusk. The writer in this letter re-

<sup>1</sup>*The Curious Gardener*, by Jason Hill, Faber & Faber, London, 1932, contains many interesting particulars of this nature. There are, also, but in another world, as it were, the old-fashioned single and double primroses of the Irish gardens. One or two collectors are already at work upon these, searching the farmhouse gardens of Cork and Kerry. The almost mythical Rex Theodore, a very deep red, edged and ticked white and red, and Derrcleugh or tortoiseshell, a relic of the time of Sir Walter Scott, are two of these forgotten plants. Others are Garryarde, a rose-coloured powdering to white: Apple blossom, which exactly suggests its name: Saturn, an old gold laced polyanthus: Captain Jones, ditto, auricula eyed and very prim in its rays and spots: Quaker, a pale blue polyanthus, silver laced: Prince Silverwings, a double polyanthus, purple frilled and edged with white: and many more, in endless beauty and variety. My own garden is happy in the possession of at least thirty varieties of them; and they may be considered as interesting and as beautiful as any new plants from China.

## THE AURICULA

calls his vivid recollections of their flower frames, often sheltered under the hawthorn hedge which usually surrounded their gardens. No visitor was ever allowed to touch the well-mealed foliage or flowers, or even to lift the lights. The scent from these newly-lifted frames he describes as unforgettable. The Gooseberry and the gold and silver laced Polyanthus were also grown to perfection in the gardens. The lingering of these flowers was the last solace of art for the slums. With their dwindling, nothing came to occupy the mind until the opening of the first cinema.

Nor is the Auricula the only flower upon which these working men exercised their fancy. Perhaps it lent itself, more than any other species, to this pursuit in the myriad patternings of its petals, powdered and diapered against the green and black enamel which were the colours of predilection, but the turbaned Ranunculus, another legacy of the eighteenth century, was worked into as many varieties that have all but disappeared, nameless, and are only to be found in cottage gardens whence the tide of industry has flowed away. The old-fashioned Fuchsias are a commentary upon middle-class modes and manners; and even the Snapdragon, or Antirrhinum, sporting such names as Fire King or Double Bloody Warrior, like the tinselled Hoxton prints of actors of that period, was developed into a plant six feet high, spotted and mottled as the Foxglove. Particular localities had their own special fancy. The weavers of Manchester and Macclesfield produced the gold laced and silver laced Polyanthus, as gorgeous as pheasants of that hue, and domesticated into absolute perfection of marking and edging. Still farther north it was the weavers of Falkirk and Middleton who excelled in growing the exhibition Pink or Dianthus. Varieties such as Inchmery or Fettes Mount, Sam Barlow or Doctor Dangan, still found in commerce, are the relics of this humble pastime which still flourishes on Tyneside. And all over the land, not only in the north, the industrious Tulip fancier has left the traces of his good luck, or imagination, in flamed and feathered

## THE AURICULA

variegations still to be seen, sometimes, in little gardens by the roadside.

It was always the striped or diapered that caught their fancy. The ideal of these artisans seems to have been to attain the maximum of artificiality, working, as it were, away from Nature into the world of imagination. Anyone, even now, when the art is lost, who sees a stand of Auriculas at a flower show must marvel at these rewards of skill and patience. It is the Auricula, more than any other flower, that gives itself to these flights of combined poetry and primness. When a poet speaks of 'Emily coloured Auriculas' it should not be necessary to explain what things are implied in the simile, for it defines in those three words the high fancy and the humble boundary of its condition. That its cultivation should be a thing of the past is only one more sign of the increasing ugliness of life. One after another every interest to the hands or eyes is removed, so that we can regard the care bestowed upon this flower, or upon any of those other flowers just mentioned, as the last and ultimate refuge of the poor man's arts, still fortifying his hardships until a late date. It is the assertion of individuality and independence, even in poverty, into the very midst of the Victorian age.

To this extent, these pages can no longer be called a picture of the present. They have the shadow of the past upon them, and some small shade of a possible future. They are the externalities, the outside world to these internal adventures. They are only a prelude in which the author's personal tastes are allowed to take their shape, before he is seriously committed to the burden of the book. Our age, which has seen the collapse of every tradition, is sorely in need of a return to those crutches. It is my contention that life has retreated into the mountains, just as it was first found in the hills and descended thence into the plain. Palaces and churches and great convents, huge altar paintings and vast frescoes are no longer any inspiration to our present needs. The very survival of religion is as curious an anachronism as it would be if every village had a witch doctor,

## THE AURICULA

supported at the expense of the public. Never more will the Church be the patron of art: nor the State: nor the Monarch: nor the Noble. The arts must be studied, now, in their humble beginnings, where they can be the work of our own hands. It is our contention that they must be sought for in the mountains, for they are no longer in the places where past generations found them.

And so we arrive at the serious beginning to this book. The chief problem before the author has been how to create for himself the opportunities he needed for the kind of writing that comes easy to him. His problem was how to give vitality to the past while combining it with what an experimental writer of our time has called the 'continuous present', and he claims to have solved this difficulty to some extent by his inventions. The Four Groups of Figures, coming after the Triumph of Death, are intended to act as a continuous entertainment, and as the human interest of these pages. Their separate items are designed to draw the reader to the entertainment offered within; or they may be thought of as the actors playing outside the tents and booths of the fair. They have the same purpose, to stimulate the curiosity of the audience. If, in the end, they come down and mingle with the audience, it is only for the last act, just before the fall of the curtain.

And when the curtain falls it is a pregnant darkness. Its antithesis trembles for the word. For all and every dilemma of the senses is waiting for the signal to be born into the void. It is expressly created for this purpose. We must wait upon that darkness and watch it flower into light. The scaffolding or frame is building. We are in the gate, at the very door, and must pass the portal to the world beyond. The giant machinery is moving.





II  
THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH



## II

# THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH

*(after the picture by Brueghel)*

**T**he scene is set for Hell. It comes roaring out of space, at first, like a rafale, a little squall of wind. Behind it, comes the storm.

This blackens for thunder. It has the stain of ice in its blackness, like a sea that is stiff with ice. And it is as heavy as blood: gouts of blood, ropes of blood, could drop from it. All the winds gather at that one place. They blow from dead bones and animal dust. Everything they have touched is dead. Their plumes are covered with it. They blow from the graveyards and the stinking slums.

And the rain has begun. The gouts fall, the long black ropes of it. The sky grows leaden and more leaden.

Of a sudden, appalling lightning traverses it, breaking from the black innermost zenith, but low down, low above the head. With the crack of the whole firmament, shuddering, shuddering, till it finds its mark, deep down in the womb, and the whole earth shakes with it. As all metals banged and crashed, as the pitcher broken; right down in the metal core, rattling the metal.

While it still thunders, lightning darts again out of the leaden emptiness and the thunderclap follows. Ceaseless thunder rolls every way at once. And it begins to blow cold. It is cold on the temples and at the wrists. There is the rushing and roaring of wind overhead. It blows through the bones, and no rags of clothing can keep it out; straight through the body, as if the body was no more than paper.

We are in the first circle of Hell. The whirlwind, like an ani-

## APOCALYPTIC

mal thing, blows round and round the dreadful gulf, like a wild beast taught to this torment. It can be seen coming; blown farther away round the circle only in order that it should come nearer. And the pit falls out of sight to the terror of the senses. There is nothing for the mind, not a single foothold, nothing but the rushing wind.

But we will come to earth out of the windy abyss, for the dead must have their world as well as the living. The material form that these visions must take can no longer be content with a crater and a pit of fire. Instead, it must assume the earthly symbols of death, and wear its livery. We must go down to the vault of dead bones.

There is still a gulf, but it is a gulf of sea running into a desolate land. And, as for the sea, it has that same stain of blood in it, stiffening the water.

From one quarter of the land the smoke of some vast conflagration, as of a whole town on fire, has spread into the sky and given a deeper shadow to the water. On the horizon, two or three wrecks are burning: burnt down to the water's edge, so that the glow of fire lies upon the water. Not a rag of sail is left upon them. Even the masts have fallen.

Nearer in to land, the symbols of death are manifest in more wrecks, tossing on the rocks. Nothing but the bare timbers, the ribs or bones of these ships, are left. All the rest has choked with the weight of waters; and not a soul remains alive upon them.

But the shores of Hell swarm with a myriad figures, and every drama of violent death is playing, at once and on every side, as in a battlefield. The outpost of this desolation is a headland, distant, but smudged with smoke. On its highest point is a blackened stump, still tied to a post, which, itself, is no more than charcoal; a human body, charred and blackened, burnt to a cinder. And, beside it, stand two sentinels of this race of the dead, two of death's warriors, high gaunt skeletons of drawn-out stature, the first to be met with of their race, first Indians on this immortal shore.



THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH, BY BRUEGHEL

*Madrid. Prado. Anderson photo*



## THE WHEELWRIGHT

Near to that headland, but on still higher ground, stands a gallows. A great double ladder reaches to its beam. The horrid bony feet of a skeleton tread these rungs; and the ribs and skull of this skeleton show above the gallows' beam as he leans down to hang a man who is trussed and bound and dangles like a marionette to every twisting of the rope. Below, a row of skeletons stand like a posse of soldiers at attention; and one of them, outside the ranks, is beating a drum.

This whole quarter of the land is not a battlefield but an execution ground. And it climbs into the air to be more visible from below. It is given special character by a group of objects of which the purpose is not immediately apparent. They are as conspicuous as monoliths, or as minarets, and their disposition gives scale to this landscape where no trees grow.

They are high wooden poles, sometimes with a stay to help their weight and prevent the dropping of the burden that they carry. For each of these poles is crowned with an immense cart-wheel, and it is these that rivet the attention and raise the eyes. For something can be seen through the spokes of each wheel. It is white and bleached, and very thin and frail. It is like a thing thrown on to a heap: dug up out of the ground: washed ashore by the waves.

These are bones broken on the wheel, and the man was alive when they tied him to the spokes. Every bone in his body was broken, joint by joint, by blows from an iron bar. If he fainted away, they revived him with cold water and waited to begin again. Sometimes the broken body was burnt; and, even then, the man had life in him and felt the new pain they inflicted upon his limp carcass. He may have thought that no more suffering could reach to him from his smashed and broken extremities that had been so difficult for his executioner to lift and carry to the stake; until fire touched the torn muscles and his senses left him just as the limbs dropped from him.

But these bodies have not been burnt. Instead, the broken bones, tied down as they are, have been lifted bodily into the

## THE WHEELWRIGHT

air; put out of human reach, to be a warning and a shame. The spark of life must have fled from them, at the first darkness, at the first touch of cold.

The wheel, or at least the pole that supports it, has been used before, for a heap of fallen bones lies at its foot. There is even a whole pelvis, with the ribs still attached, that looks wirelike and trembling, as if the bones would all shake and dance together in the wind. While, up above on the wheel, there is nearly a whole body, like the shell of some dead insect—as horrible as that—just out of reach. Sometimes the leg bones, once the rope has been eaten away, have thrust up into the air, like the legs of an insect lying on its back. And death, and the height they are at, has made them disproportionately long.

In every direction there are these wheels. None of them is without its burden, but some have slipped a little in their socket and are no longer straight upon the pole. Where this has happened, they seem to be offering you the dead, holding them up in order that you should see them better, coming towards you, advancing on you; or, if leaning away, they are trying to shake down the bones which have become obstinate and will not leave their place of torture.

A raven is perched on every one of these wheels, yet not in order to feed, for all the flesh has gone. But the rim of the wheel is its daily perch, while it waits for more bodies to come. If it were not for these bones, and were this a land of anything but sable wings, the storks would build their nests aloft upon the poles; there is all the space they need and, if the mind could forget for a single instant the true purpose of these poles, it is, indeed, a nest of some sort that the eyes would suggest, but a nest to which the living prey is carried, a nest in which the inhabitants are too careless to dispose of the carrion so that they allow the bones to rot away in the very nest itself. And, at that, these are old nests, the twigs and the straw have all blown away, leaving nothing but the bones.

But these posts are not alone in their kind. There is, besides,



## IMPALED

the great double gallows, the first object that we met with on this shore; and, nearer at hand, there stands a gibbet with a body hanging from it. This body has that same fearful elongation of the feet, for the bones of the foot always look longer than the foot itself. They are like the feet of a crane: like the feet of some bird that has to stand, day and night, in the shallows.

Near to this, there is worse still. It is a dead tree, killed and blackened by lightning, hollow at its base and ending in a few sharp spikes of stems. The hollow trunk has become a throne on which the body of a man is sitting, with his naked back towards the spectator. He is pierced through, nailed into place by a long lance through the middle of his back; the fact that this is the only attachment of his body conveying, somehow, an even greater horror than would have been the case had he been secured with ropes or chains. He has his back turned; he cannot even see what is coming to him, though his back is in the full glare of sunlight, but has to gaze into starvation at the fungus darkness, while the spider weaves shroud after shroud for him and waits for him to die.

His companion, or perhaps it is worse if this was never his comrade but a corpse, already, when he came to share the tree with him, is impaled upon one of the branches, high above. The spike of it has been sharpened a little, and was, in any case, toughened with fire. It has been passed through the muscles of his chest, close to the ribs; and he will stay there until complete decay loosens all but the bones. Meanwhile, his body has been coated with pitch the better to preserve it and in order to match him with his tree. He is blackened and shrivelled, but could still be recognized by those who had known him. Only the thinning and shrivelling of his flesh has drawn out his body into that same dreadful elongation. He is so fearful, such a symbol of death's degradation, that it is difficult to feel sorry for him. It is impossible to believe that this creature can ever have walked. He must rather have crawled, trailing those useless limbs after

## THE KNACKER'S MARE

him along the ground. They are more like the withered tail of some dead fish than the legs and feet of what was once a man. And, up above there, his arms are neatly folded behind him; as one acrobat will fold his arms in order that another may lift him, just as though this dead man had helped his executioners to carry him into place by keeping still and doing exactly as he was told. He is still obedient upon his branch; and perhaps nothing but another flash of lightning will dislodge him.

From now onwards the vision scatters into detail, into pantomimes of death, grotesque and horrible. Fantasies of terror are playing in every direction. A fearful procession approaches. It must be called that from the slow deliberation of its pace. It is a wooden cart; no more, at first, than that; and from the fact that the spokes of the wheels can be seen separately, in static isolation, it must be moving as slowly as possible. It is drawn with halting step by an appalling apparition, a white-grey mare. This is a ghost from the bull ring, or the knacker's yard; a horse from the shambles. For there is no flesh at all upon its bones. The frightful neck, mottled and dappled in leprous parody of its glossiness in life, trails, trails, towards the ground. This neck has a dragged mane upon it, a mane that has grown in death, that, weedlike, has fed upon decay. The neck lifts and falls a little with each step, and has scarcely strength enough to raise the head, which shows the sockets of the dead eyes and the long yellow teeth. There is even a horror about the harness, for the leather is green and mildewed. The neckband is split open, and its padding of horsehair, from some other horse long dead, gushes out in fronds of wire. This is at the horse's shoulder. Its back and belly have had a black cloth thrown across them; and on this sable saddlecloth sits a skeleton, not riding the horse, but just sitting on its back, as a farm labourer would do on his way home from the fields. His bony feet rest upon the shafts of the cart; and between his legs, against the black of the saddlecloth, he holds an hourglass, as it might be a lantern for the winter night. His other hand is upon that spectral neck, resting in

## THE KNACKER'S MARE

that mane, and his bony fingers hold a bell that tolls at every step, as if to warn his way through the Stygian fog. Behind him, on the horse's crupper, sits a black raven.

As for the cart, it is a farm cart, but made of coffin boards, and piled high with bones and skulls. A spade, or shovel, lies on top of them, as if this were a load of swedes or turnips. Sitting in the cart there is another skeleton, companion to him who rides the mare: and he holds on his knee a sort of hurdygurdy, or mechanical lute, of which he touches the strings with one hand and turns the handle with the other. Its grinding, wheezy music, as of a dance or ballad, drawn slow into a dirge, is very quiet and slow, only to be heard with the creaking of the cartwheels. This image of death trails slowly, slowly, ahead into the fog; and is lost to view long before its music dies.

Such is the first circle of Hell. But, since it is a purgatory of the spirit, the soul is not dead. These are not dead waters of the sea. There is no Hell for senseless things. This is the mind's agony. Hell must have its ghosts, and the pit or the arena fills with figures that are seen in curious and dreadful clearness. It is as if they were burning at the stake.

They are half hidden, as if in smoke, and then shewn forth of a sudden as though by the flame. They are immobile, motionless, as if tied down, bound for punishment. It is not the distant flickering of the lightning that reveals them; nothing so dramatic illumines these waxworks, for they are as horrible as that. But they have the static stare of waxworks, even if the aethereal fires do not melt their flesh; and the agony of mind that has engendered them gives these phantoms their air of realism, and, dreamlike, has invented a thousand details to prove their truth.

The first vision is the ugliness of the immediate past.

The greater the hero, the more he is thrown into ridicule and bathos by his household gods. If the works of great men live after them, which is the crumb of comfort offered to those who die unsuccessful, then their personality, which must have some

## CHEAP DEATH

other survival than the printed page or the painted canvas, stays here in purgatory beside their bodies. And it is expressed, since the rest has found tongue or lives in the images they have created, by their personal belongings. If these are few and poor it makes their fate more poignant; if they are many, it points the contrast between the living and the dead. In purgatory there is more of the owner's personality in a torn coat, or in a battered hat, than is contained in all the works of his spirit. It is by their rags that we knew their owners.

It is characteristic of this anguish, this internal stress that has built up this Hell, that the horror, the nausea of its projections should clothe those of the dead who are least distant from us in time with the deepest intensity of horror. This is at its worst where there might be a shred of flesh left upon the bones, for the skeleton is, ever, less ghastly than the dead body. And, where it is worst, the same nausea extends itself to the clothes of the spectres, and to their personal possessions.

We see the sham Caesars, the cheap dictators, in a fire of newspapers. They burn like paper thrown upon the fire. The sentences of their damnation still show through the burning tinder, as they might be the guilty words in a love letter thrown too late upon the fire and still to be read there in the light of its own flame. All their lies and false alarms are so many voices shrieking at them from the hoardings. The words they have cheapened and made odious are bellowed forth in the battery of winds. And, in their torment, they are made ridiculous by the 'set' in which they suffer, for it is like an office on a revolving stage, and they are made to appear as if constantly interviewing, or telephoning instructions. But it is not even as brave as that. It is only a perpetual fair in which they offer their souls for sale. They are 'selling the news', and no one will buy it. But this is not the real purgatory: it is no more than a pension, a lodging house where false fame ekes out its ends in contumely and shame.

Let us, at least, turn to the pitiful. Let it be the purgatory in which those suffer who were denied their opportunity in life and

## THE MIDWIFE

find no consolation in being dead. It is only less bitter than the purgatory of those whose crescent fame dwindled from the moment of their deaths. They died in the certainty of fame, only to find immortality denied to them.

Both of these races of the dead are burning, burning: but in an icy flame that does not consume them. But they burn, nevertheless; and it is as if they were chained to the stake.

It is even worse than the agony of those who actually died by fire: died for their beliefs, and knew there was no God after all. No hand came to comfort them. They were sifted into ashes; and disintegration, the melting of their bones, was accomplished without a sign. If there had been a God, he would have soothed them at the last.

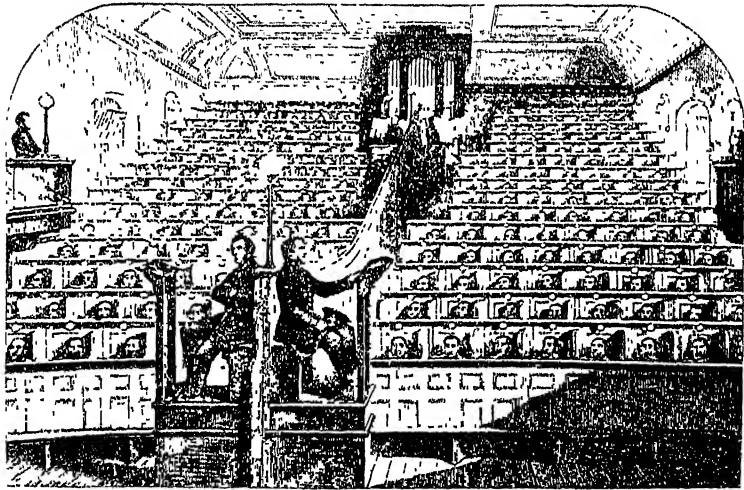
So let us keep to the pitiful. The horrors of the old clothes-shop are implicit in this immensity where the whirlwind plays. And the clothes are green with mildew: they are stained as if they were the very graveclothes of the dead. For our Hell is the era of the silk hat, the stovepipe symbol of the sins of the machines. The English era. The century of fog.

They died in it. The poorest of the poor, piled up above one another in the graveyard; so that the coffin, nailed down of necessity, has many other coffins above it, crushing it down. They are fifteen or twenty coffins deep in the greater cemeteries of London, and their names can no longer be read upon the name-plates. Did those fare any better who had handles of chromium plate to their coffin, and a decoration of 'coffin lace' in stamped white metal for enrichment to the bare boards? How can immortality await these dead?

When they died, the blind was drawn down in the room; and soon a woman came up the wooden stairs, a woman with the form of a charwoman or a midwife. She was dressed in black and carried a little bag. Her tools, the instruments of this passion, were a towel, a sponge and a comb; and the friends, or relations, must spare a clean sheet. Her work was slow and silent, a washing of the body, a folding of the hands.

## THE MIDWIFE

Such was death in the poorest of the slums. But it is not their wraiths whom we see here. We must understand that, at the best, these had no souls. They were born to a Hell, and died in it. And, in the distance, there is ever the whirlwind like a frightful surf. It can be seen coming; blown farther away round the circle only in order that it should come nearer. And the pit falls out of sight to the terror of the senses. There is nothing for the mind; not a single foothold, nothing but the rushing wind.



III  
PARADISO



George Bruckshank



### III PARADISO

#### I. Four Groups of Nudes

**T**his begins in idleness upon the waters. Little does that matter so long as it lives before the eyes. It shall have substance, if only to the eyes and to the touch of hands.

Figures of flesh and blood must move within it. So we will open it on the waters, in a water cloister. And this must be the echo of its age; not the shaking of the lotus, nor yet the bell's cold clapper through the frosts of morning. That was for the ghosts of time gone by: this is of the air we breathe. Here are the actors.

##### *i. The Bathing Pool*

The scene is a swimming pool.

It is the well or fountain head of fancy: the spring at which images are born and from which they flow. The arena is that of an ordinary bathing pool: but we must describe the transmutations of this water cloister.

It is a bathing pool, and the water is full of nymphs. They pattern the air in every conceivable attitude; never still for long, but changing with natural and fluid poetry from one pose into another. The whole effect of their movements is that of one single corporate impulse. Even when they lie still it is in rhythm like the stay or pause in a tune by which it is given shape and meaning. The stresses, or the accents, come at each new breaking of the water. Not a moment passes that there is not a nymph

## PLAY OF LIGHT

climbing out at the brim; another, standing poised and taut upon the diving plank, ready to leap back again; or plunged, like a thrown dagger, along the flower of water.

The surface is flooded with an intense, a gentian-blue daylight, on which the ribs and bars of shadow are like the stripes of the bathing dresses. These make a pattern of light upon light, as it were of cherry-red upon white, for the bars of shade are bright and luminous in themselves. They pass like the shadow of water over the bodies of the bathers: they only help to build the cage of light and are blind and invisible upon the hen's-egg brown of the limbs. For not one white skin spoils the colour of this water cloister: all are golden-brown, or its alloys, from that clear and even eggshell up to sultry bronze. And all these hues of skin are saturated with the heat and light, for their different tints have been developed, not as a protection against the sun, but in order to retain its benefits. Indeed, their tawny smoothness has been expressly coloured so as not to dissipate its lights.

Meanwhile, the rhythm of movement never ceases. It unfolds from within itself; and its heart, or body, is the water. This is the theatre, or stage for display: the exits or entrances upon that region of violent light being its incidents of drama. But this scene has all those dimensions of which the stage is deprived by its limitations. The stage is but a plain: this is a mountain and a gulf. Not only do its movements take effect above and below the mere level of the boards; but, also, their play is to the benefit of every direction at once instead of to a single, calculated area.

It is a drama of pleasure and delight. What it lacks of luxuriance or pathos is compensated for in its colours. These are concomitant with sun and heat. They are the emanation of the day.

The sky is an intense, violent abyss of blue into which the bathers can climb to the height of a rung or two. It is like an ascent into a sea, with the laws of space set at naught and broken. They climb up the ladders and are shown in that aethereal light with its blue fires upon their shoulders and limbs. Yet this blue

## THE DIVING BOARD

light is but the shadow: it is the darkness of that ocean, and only lies within the curves of their bodies as they pose for a dive. At all other points they are touched and crowned with the golden sunlight, in a golden aureole or patina upon them. It is a golden outline, a horizon to their bodies; while above, and to every side of them, lies the blue of space.

Its profundity gives an impertinent daring to their poses. And in the violent concentration of that light they can be seen in shameless detail, without any of the trickery and make-believe of the stage. This is no flat frieze, or bas relief, with only one dimension in which to present itself to the audience, but a spectacle playing to every quarter of the winds, to be admired, as a piece of sculpture should be, from every angle at once. And, like a drama in miniature of this whole scene in the bathing pool, these figures that climb the ladder and stand on the diving plank have their own rhythm and form a group or entity of their own.

For its importance in this drama the ladder that leads up to the platform might be the steps of an altar. But its sheer height above the water, designed in order to induce slight thrills of apprehension and terror, gives to these thin trestles, as well, the semblance of an executioner's platform, erected high and clear so as to be visible to all. And, if this is so, the play is constantly renewed and given fresh life as one bather after another dives into the pool and her place is at once taken up by the next figure from the rungs. That moment, as each girl waits for her turn, has, indeed, something added to its other beauties by this little chill of expectancy.

The lines made by the ladder and its rungs play an essential part in the whole composition. As forming a frame for the figures they might be compared to the lines of a squared drawing, or to the scales and meshes of a net. If it was not for their help, the eyes would remember nothing of such quick and bird-like tread, for their ascent up the whole height of the ladder is an affair of a few leaps and springs into the cloudless and blue hea-

## THE DIVING BOARD

ven above. And how is it possible to describe that moment when a nymph, rising out of the limbo of shadows, emerges into the full and unabashed brilliance of sun? It is like the entrance of a dancer upon a celestial stage, or the landing of a winged figure upon a cloud. She has arrived, and every ounce in the balance of her body, every detail of her attitudes, expresses the excitement and the perilous thrill. Not only this, but the sharp, clifflike fall of the perspective exaggerates her proportions, as seen from below. Her slight and graceful legs, the lyre of her hips, are stressed in substance and importance. Her elevation into the blue aether has made a goddess of her form.

Perhaps, in the whole repertory of poetry, there could be no more lovely sight than this. There are always three or four girls upon the platform, and they move about its cloudlike limits with the lazy step imposed upon them by this little area to which they are confined. It is a vision from the pagan world; for, in her separate entity, each girl is a naked statue in the sky. But that was snow-cold: high, high above the ilex, touching on the limestone hills. This is no mountain vale, where every step bruises an aromatic herb, where the air is so pure and the world so young\* that such a miracle may show herself upon a cloud. Those were fantasies of the mind, for the sake of eyes that had looked in vain among the vines and in the olive groves: these are true figments of the sunlight, not cold statues, but living creatures of flesh and blood. Nor are there shades of snow and marble in their colour, for if there is any semblance to sculpture in these figures their substance is of molten metal, not the chill marble of the quarry. They have been poured from the fire and not hewn from the block. They move with a facile, easy grace, with the repose of athletes, in such a perfection of poise that every next move they make might be a spring or a leap.

The loveliness of the scene increases with every gesture and every movement. Not the least factor in this is the contrast of their burnt limbs to the gay colours they are wearing; in spots or stripes above the supple, metal column of the waist, shown

## WATER DRAMA

openly below that; their thighs, firm and tight from the clinging wet of the waters, moulded in keen beauty above their graceful legs, which, seen from below, are their finest and most dramatic expression, possessing all the subtlety and tensity of the most exquisitely delicate hands. And, so dark are their limbs, that, against them, these gay colours of the bathing dresses become the most faded refinements of pallor. They make a pattern of light upon light, against the sultry brilliance of the skin. The edges of their bright bars, or ribs, fade out into the sky, so that the whole contour of a body is only expressed by the limbs and is nearly invisible in that blindness of white and red stripes, or whatever bright colours have been chosen for the water.

Their eloquence of limbs, as though this tactile beauty was their mode of speech and the method by which to tell one nymph from another, is made more manifest still by the difficulty in recognizing any of the features at this distance and with this rapidity of change. How, indeed, is this possible, when the flowering of a moment hurls herself in a parabola into the pool? It is as if that moment is her climax and her extinction; and she is thrown down, just at the crisis of it, through the fields of light into chaos as though in punishment. Yet, by that same reversal of the laws of Nature that made her climbing of the ladder into an ascent into a sea, her plunge down into the waters is the delayed zenith, the last breath of pleasure. It shares the little degradation of such awakenings, when, to the touch of the chill waters, this body that has flown along the air in such a noble curve reaches to the end of her volition in the viscous depths and swims away like any animal. And, at once, her place upon the platform is taken up by another girl, who, in the concentration of every particle of sunlight and by the wonderful and lovely tensity of her body, becomes for that instant the focus of the whole scene as she prepares herself for her leap. But the tremendous purpose of her pose, and in the wait before its accomplishment, has something slavlike and obedient in its movements.

## WATER DRAMA

One moment she is a shining divinity, and the next, an abject and dishonoured body. And, even in her moment, before her breath of heaven, she is not to be distinctly known from her companion who dived before her and is just climbing out at the brim. She is recognized as having stood there before upon the platform, but any special memory of her vanishes with the next girl who takes her place.

Meanwhile, at the different heights and levels of this water drama, the pattern is playing itself into the most fanciful and elaborate lengths. At every moment it is renewed and given fresh vitality. This is not only from the figures to be seen in the pool itself, but, also, at its brim, or on the shallow steps, where the act of emergence reveals the secrets of the water and restores these figures that have been half hidden to their proper sphere. They come up like statues from the sea, step by step, until their whole beauty is visible; or climb out in a ravishment of attitudes upon the edge. It is as if they ascended from night into day, so abrupt is the transition; and in their new medium the drops of water upon their shoulders and arms are soon the only reminder of the pool, as it might be the marks of dew after a night passed in the long grass of the meadows. Yet it is only a moment before they go back to the pool; or are lying, at least, so near to its brim that the reflection of their bright tints colours the surface, that is swollen and shaking with the play of other limbs, while the shadow of the pool itself waves its blue petals against their bodies, like the phantom of blue lilies blowing in the wind.

Such is the afternoon in all its length; and if something of sentiment broods upon these lively waters it is the sense that this is but the prelude or overture to a new world. These are its neophytes. They live by the freedom of its conventions, and are different in this from everything of the past. The bathing pool is the scaffolding or frame for their presentation; it is the archway by which they make their entrance upon the scene, and no other introduction to them is necessary.

## TO THE SACRIFICE

### *ii. Chorus*

These figurants, who, just now, made so brave a show in the sunlight, who moved like statues against the sun, and hurled themselves in lovely tensivity along the level airs and laughed up a moment later from the shaking waters, are alive in any medium with no less ease and grace. They are still dressed for the water, but now we must clothe them; and this is achieved by a limitless expansion of the boundaries within which they are confined. The scene is no longer a swimming pool, nor even a lotus tank; and, if it is still, in some sense, a cloister, this is only because of the rapid changes that can be wrought into its properties. There can be many cloisters, but, for our present purpose, a cloister is any space enclosed between four walls.

So we will leave them in the theatre.

One after another they come out into the full showering of the lights. The air is stiff from all that brilliance, and the authentic limelight, playing through this, waits for each girl to appear, follows her, and comes back for the next. The pursuit is in rhythm with the music, while the deliberate slowness of its pace intensifies the effect made by each entrance. Their personality is in full flower from the moment they emerge out of the shadow, and its false life lasts just for a moment and leaves them at the other side. The accompanying music gives the air to these variations, or it might be described as the stem that supports this profuse flowering.

One by one they are given to the audience, dangled temptingly in the certainty that they cannot fall, convoyed across from shadow into shadow by the lights. Behind that certainty they surrender themselves, as if it were a sacrifice, an immolation. And their support is the music; because of that they are able to interpret to the extreme ends of this convention.

It is the bas relief, the moving frieze, and nothing except its

## TO THE SACRIFICE

limitations has had to be considered. Anything over and above this is a superfluity, a throwing away of overabundance. Only one dimension is concerned, while they go from wing to wing along the music; nothing else than this matters. Therefore, the view of them from the wings or from the back has been left altogether out of their calculations. The lights of the theatre are, in fact, blind except where they are told to travel. Nor can their beams surround the dancers with that ambience of light that is the unique property of sunlight; the dancers are not wrapped in it; nor does it cling to them, as do fronds or twigs that strike with all their strength and curve with the curving body. The limelight catches them, and then dashes itself blindly against the painted scene; while this contrast in the lights is only more pointed since the dancers are still dressed for the water.

It is the last and final curtain, and we need imagine no background, nothing but black emptiness into which the lights must play. How different from the blue airs of the swimming pool! This is the edge of night, or like a noiseless sea waiting for them a foot or two away. And the dancers have stepped straight out of the sunlit waters. They are only dry, and, apart from that, the lights play upon them just as if they were still exposed upon that high platform above the pool. Nothing could ever show them more clearly to the eyes.

One by one they come up to the footlights. It is a salvo, a fusillade of questions that answer themselves immediately they are spoken, finding their answers on the limbs and in every movement to the music. Lit from below, the dancers are shown in new and revealing frankness, with marks like shadows at their knees. They are moving in an universe of light; and this additional glare of the footlights, thrown vertically upon them up into their faces, probes into the remotest secrets of their being. It plays without stricture upon their legs and arms; and, as they pass through each new orbit of the light, there is just time to look into their faces. Their eyes and their lips are smiling, but with the semblance of being slightly bruised or swollen by



## NO BACKGROUND

violence, disabused by this rain of fire, with their prettiness shed from them by force. The short spell of life allowed to each dancer, and the way in which she is quickly followed by the next, is another deflowering of her mystery. It is shaken from her sunburnt body by the degradation of the music. One by one they come forward to submit to this; and each in her turn dwells in the flame and has its marks upon her against the tawny of the true sunlight. That is dark and livid on their skins: it is brown as a hen's egg or a ripe nectarine: so dark that it is animal, like a tamed animal, and less to be pitied for that.

The last strains die upon the ears. The very end of the music is visible, lying just in front of the eyes. This is the last culmination of the lights, close to the wings; and, as the music dies, they die at once, and the theatre falls into complete darkness, absolute and unbroken. It is dark as a dead swimming pool, or moonless cloister. But it is a pregnant darkness. Its antithesis trembles for the word.

All this, and more, the dancers can interpret. Being the *dramatis personae* of all situations and of every story, their cast of characters is strong enough to meet every emergency of the imagination. They are the only machinery that is necessary, and no other frame or convention need be used. Neither is their presence indispensable on all and every occasion, for there will be contingencies in which they only figure on a pediment, or are given to the woods to be their haunting shadow. And yet it seems as if no history is complete without them; even if, in substance, they are no more than the echo to a whispered question. Our neophytes may be these figurants of the water pool. They live by the freedom of its conventions, and are the *dramatis personae* of all situations and of every story. We will prove the delights of the old world and of the new in their company.

iii. *Hortus Conclusus*

For this, the snare or frame is set to the perfume of the bean-fields.

The burnished spring weather lies on every hill in this land of milk-white oxen. Also, it is the land of lilies, and fields of iris grow on every side till they rise in a blue bank into a copse of nightingales. These sing while it is still daylight and a crescent moon climbs an empty sky.

Here, in a cool villa, live the young men and women who have fled from the plague of Florence. It is a *hortus conclusus*, a garden walled in and inviolate. This is their refuge, and the youths and maidens pass the time in telling stories to each other, wasting all the spring upon these fantasies. The blossom comes and the blossom falls, and still they have not finished. And, after every ten tales, the whole company of youths and maidens gather together until Boccaccio parts them again and they listen in silence to more stories.

We may imagine, if we like, the passing of those hours within that prison of the fancy. It is, in truth, a prison, because every object touched by the imagination is either in prison with them, or else it exists in that outside world to which they have no access. The delights of the mind are but shadows in the shuttered rooms; their realization lies beyond the reach. Only shadows are in prison with them at the trembling of the casement. If ever time moves and they join the world again they will soon forget the affections of that long summer. These lulled the long siesta: and, now, are as dead as that.

It is an atmosphere that is propitious for poetry. They are clothed in it, and every word they utter has the cloy of it, the honey torpor, the languor at its lips. And it is necessary to tread softly, as if music is playing. This is from the cadence of the voice.

Perhaps the world stirs again, and it is one of those mornings

## DO NOT WAKE THEM!

that fill the mind with sails! One of those mornings when a journey should begin! The sky glistens like a beach of fine sand after a storm. All the world is expectant, of electric sparkle, made fresh as with wind after rain. They are free again.

And yet, so far as we are concerned, they can never leave that prison. We have only to turn the pages of a book, and we listen to their stories. They are, indeed, imprisoned for ever, condemned to each other's company in perpetuity. But their paradise, their *hortus conclusus*, is only more isolated with the passing of every year. Seldom, if ever, are they disturbed; and we can think of them living in a never-ending spring, still playing with the affections of the warm walls and the court of waters.

### *iv. The Lily Tank*

Or it is the Orient and the lily tank.

The Kings of old India dwell here, glittering in a steady tremolo from their jewels. They are dressed in white clothes powdered with golden roses and their heads are diademed. They wear wreaths of diamonds on their necks. Poets, wearing masks, and dressed like birds, speak their opinions aloud to the monarch. The groves of champak trees drench all the airs with the odours of their blue flowers. As for the King's women, they are covered with gold and their slaves bask in the sycamore shade, behind the lattice.

It is the world of Ajanta. Here are the only great paintings of dark-skinned races portrayed by themselves; and, in nearly every instance, the lily tank is either the motive, or else it has supplied the accessories. Our figurants of the swimming pool must burn to shades of cinnamon and clove, and they will be pale Indians of the lily tank. Their dress need be no more than flowers of cassia at their ears; or a tower of jasmine, a mitre of jasmine, for their hair.

## MASKS OF JASMINE

This forgotten world has no other existence than in these painted caves and it only trembles into life by the light of torches, or it is ever dark. The scenes of banquet continue in impenetrable night: the processions have come to a standstill in the darkness; the lily tank has no need of the lotus, and the girls are hidden in their masks of jasmine. But, to the Indian sunlight, or its simulance, these dead figures come to life, the fields of light take on their flowers, and the profuse shade has its pleasures.

The deepest subtleties of meaning attach to every attitude and gesture, and nothing is careless or the fruit of accident. It is, indeed, a world of rarefied sensation. This is proved in the delicate tenuousness of its themes, for whole series of these frescoes, either at Ajanta or at the few other sites where this school of painters was at work, are representations of scenes from musical dramas accompanied by dances, or else the subject is no more substantial than a number of girls tossing flowers to each other. Such subtlety have the shades of gesture that there need be no other speech than the language of the hands. Indeed, a symbolism more elaborate than any that could be carried by the spoken word, and more swift in its changes, informs every inflection of their wrists. The fingers are five tongues to every hand in this kingdom of the serpent. Nor is this the only structure of meaning to which our eyes are blind, for as much imagery attaches to every attitude in which they stand. This is because they were trained to it from earliest youth, and long before they were ten years old were accomplished in the dance. With this knowledge in mind it is easy to imagine the play their painters could give to the theme of the flower throwing.

The Indian sun pours fire upon their bodies, but the lotus tank is like milk below the leaves, it is like a lake of milk shaded with the mango. Meanwhile, the girls throw their flowers, and one or two of them, whether to prove they are daughters of the god, or just for the enticement of this denial, are shown in great beauty at their heads and breasts, but are hidden in clouds up to

## BLACK LOTUS

their navel. This was no prudery, for their minds had no conception of this shame. The other girls, as if in the light of blue air, as if they were the core, the living heart or principle of this daylight, stand near enough for our hands to touch them, and throw the blossom to each other while the flower of cassia trembles at their ears. It is as if a rope of flowers was passed from hand to hand; as if their fingers were pulling at the ropes of flowers, or tearing them apart in blossom. They are painted so near to us that we can feel the wind of their movements as they throw the flowers; and because of their tawny skins and their feline tread the sensation in watching them is that they are shewn as near to our eyes as lionesses behind the bars of a cage. But the garlands are of invisible flowers, we only feel them from the gestures of their idle hands, where the fingers are flowerless and empty. They impersonate the shade, and coolness of its recesses, or beckon languorously into the shadow. Their language is of dalliance and its inducements. And, as often, their hands hold the blossoms; they curl their fingers to cup them for the scent; or wait, outstretched, for the falling from the air. This is never from far, for they are playing in a circle, in a broken and uneven circle, for a symbol of the belt or girdle of the greater stars; though their elevation into immortality comes suddenly to earth with the figure of one girl who stoops down to pick up a flower that she has dropped. Her Indian darkness, her supple body, bend down from the heavens as if to the humility of the shoestring. She is near enough for our hands to catch her; and, while this lovely and nubile animal bends so close to us, we admire the shell-like curves of her face and see the cassia flower shake and dangle at her ear.

But the lily tank fills with maidens. They are the *gopīs*, the dancing girls, who plunge straight into its coolness from the dance, with no hesitation, wearing nothing that destroys. They throw themselves from heaven, out of the airs of heaven, seen in their entirety with skins of saffron or of clove; and, striking the water, shake the lotus, and come up laughing in the leaves

## LIONESS

or by the petals. And one or two climb out again, at once, in order to feel the water running from them and the cool air upon their bodies; and, as soon as they are dry, will dive again.

These we will change for our neophytes of the bathing pool, to let them stand along the brim. And the dusky Indians fade in their colours before this sunburnt fairness.

One girl is leaning against a pillar, against the stone pillar of a pavilion. She leans her weight upon one leg, and the other leg, with bent knee, profits from the pillar's coolness, for the sole of that foot touches upon it; and, indeed, it makes all her back cool, for she stands as close to it as if she was bound there. The straight flank of the pillar makes a frame for her, or it is like measure or a gauge for her beauties. In her hands she holds a flower and bends her neck in order to look down into it; while the sister flower still blows at her ear, above the shell of her ear, and twined into her braided hair. This is golden, and in length like a mask of fronds—no longer. Looking up and down her body, the irritation of that lovely form is like the sting of nettles, or like fire, up into her locks again and fixed there by their gold. In perfect length of limb, proportioned like the pillar, in tallied roundness; the neck to the calf of leg, the waist like the two calves joined together. Her skin, all saffron, as if dusted or powdered with gold, tawny, and without blemish, burnt to deeper tinge of darkness than the pallid Indians, who, for beauty, are the palest of their race. These, for that purpose, have parried the sun; while this neophyte has dwelt in its fires, as molten metal into molten metal. She is steeped in them, even at this moment, but is too lazy to lie down, and still stands at the pillar. And there we will leave her, for she is but our transmutation of the most beautiful of these paintings. She can stand at one pillar, and her sister Indian at the other. Each girl has cassia at her ears; and, this flower apart, they are as different as the two worlds. For the cave is in complete darkness once more; but, to-morrow, when the torch is lit, the lioness will have gone.

### III

## PARADISO

### 2. Episodes of Gilles

Imagine perfection, or a plenitude of the senses! It is a paradise of the mind and spirit, for we cannot satisfy the soul. We need an open heaven, not a shut paradise, nor the trembling of the lotus. But we must not have to go outside its walls. The cosmogony, or entity, must lie within the covers of this book. Its boundaries, which can be extended to infinity or drawn in to the confines of a little room, must fence in great areas that are created at will out of the hazards of the moment. In fact, the properties are made as they are called for. There are woods of ilex, trellised vines, and the nocturnal orange grove. It is paradise, but purgatory as well.

We first see it in the sky. It is one of those mornings that fill the mind with sails! One of those mornings when a journey should begin! The airs are vibrant, of electric sparkle, made fresh as with wind after rain.

Yet, in spite of the favour of these omens, the morning passes in profound and endless agitation. There is a whirring and tearing of the ends of nerves. Nothing can hold the mind for more than a moment, and the fragments drop like lead. It is as if they pass to the lips, go bitter, and then drop upon the ground. The more pleasant the thought, the more bitter and brackish it becomes. The mind rejects them, one after another, like a sick man refusing a cup of wine. There is nothing that is any comfort. And yet the mind will embark on any project, for a moment, until its emptiness turns away the cup from the lips. In fact, such thoughts die of their own hollowness. They are eagerly seized

## THE AGONY OF THE NERVES

upon, and as quickly thrown aside. But they crowd as fast upon the mind as images of fever. Each new shape is born or fashioned from the one before it, like the leering faces in a high temperature. To this extent, they are daemonic in their origin, born in the lower centres of the soul, at animal level, underneath the heart. This is why the mind refuses them and knows their emptiness. Yet, they are tricked out in pathos, as if only to be bruised by the whirring and tearing in which they are involved. This becomes more and more terrible with the fraying of the nerves. For they have refused every aid, being bent on their own anguish, utter and complete.

How long such a state of nerves can continue is a question of personal temperament. It differs in every case and at each fresh occasion. But this is the agony that cannot keep one still: it is necessary to be walking, even within the four walls of a room. This is the agony that never dies. It burns up in a moment to its latest mood of suffering so that any moments of calm are forgotten, and all is pain. The mind can forget this when it is at peace, just as we are specially constituted only to think of the living and not the dead. If it was otherwise we should be perpetually haunted, prepossessed by death.

But the very straying of these words must mean a little hushing of the pain. It comes back and dashes the cup from the lips; and yet these outer reflections, these shadows from the living world, come back once more and hang before the eyes. They dangle for our interest, to be taken in the hand, to draw the attention. And they are not strong enough, they fade. But there is life in them: they come back and fill with living breath. The storm dies down, and the realities find their voices and their tricks of the living.

It is time now for the theme to be assembled into architecture. Its plastic qualities have already been put to the proof; and, with the return of reality, the living world builds itself into a street of houses. For this is no nostalgia of the country. The breath of it would die of inanition in the fields. Its necessary



## POPULAR MUSIC

background is a street of houses. It lives upon the pavement, and its height of trees is three flights of stairs. This is the creature of the lights.

At the outset, it is, again, a picture of the present. It is tied down to time by images of the moment, even by the names of plays advertized upon the passing motor-buses. These are its labels or indications, diurnal parallels to the names of dead musicians or dramatists decorating with idiot insistence the walls of old theatres and concert halls. Thus does the ignoble moment pass and re-pass before the eyes.

It is reiterated in the tunes of the hour. These cheap and flashy personalities are the brave colours of the morning, and the interruptions of its business; living out their lives to the last dregs before they are silenced, only to start again as the contagion spreads from mouth to mouth. They are drugs of a moment's duration, little doses against hired occupation. They have no power over its working hours, or upon the pay, but they are the palliation of its dreariness and monotony. Other beings, from a world without music, would be at a loss to account for this strange behaviour, this celestial play of their antipodes, as peculiar to their eyes as kite flying above the rice fields or the game of fireworks in a paper town, Chinese pleasures which we cannot understand. For this is definitely a drug, made wholesale by a race of druggists, and insinuated with oriental patience into every corner of the world.

Such is the morning. But the very fact that it is becoming possible to discuss its aspects betokens a calming of the nerves. The cosmogony has begun to grow. Soon the real and the magical can be mingled. At present, it is still the externalities that prompt the mind. These are seized upon for comfort, or at least for interest, even if they are rejected and thrown to the ground before the end. Fantasies on personality begin to amuse the imagination with their conjectures, though they are hastily taken down and hurried away like the old-fashioned pierrots' booth, at Scarborough, upon the tidal sands, at the threat of the

## THE PIERROTS ON THE SANDS

incoming sea. They are not given time to finish. And yet the mind goes back to them, because of the feigned love of the theatre boards. Even their mimic warfare was at the mercy of leaden interruptions, irrevocable occasions, for the tides swept into the bay as surely as night comes after day. They would begin again, so soon as opportunity permitted, but, it may be supposed, only to that point where the hopelessness of the cliché was displayed, as if they smiled across to each other at the end of a song in the spirit of 'make believes', a sort of childish superstructure, an extra casing of sentiment over and above the infantilism of the parts they had to play. And then the tide came in, and attendants folded up the chairs and took away the boards and canvas with a horse and cart, until the next performance upon those illusory sands.

These were sympathetic barriers. They could be enlarged, or set back, so as to include nearly every contingency of mood. It was the double artifice that appealed to one in this imagery of the seashore; not only the duplicity of the actors but, also, the possibility that there was another pretence, a secondary drama, working to an abortive climax at the dropping of the curtain and never resumed in lodgings, or behind the scenes, because it was not worth while. This motive of economy, just because it was a material deficiency more than a weakness in the spirit, soothed and comforted the heart. This warm feeling, even if it is negative in effect because poverty has prevented it from finding expression, comes from the poor and never from the rich. There must be lodgings in this very street, at the back of the lamplight, but empty and untenanted by day. On this fine morning, their problems of personality were, so to speak, flat with the façades of the houses that stretched away into the distance in eternal but drab respectability.

At the mention of any house the battery of nerves throbbed and pounded into battle. Its violence obliterated every other impression and rang inside the head like an insistent tune. Like a tune, forgotten and suddenly remembered, but with more

## THE PAINS OF WAITING

force than this could ever possess because its powers laid such violent hold upon the heart. It stormed and rattled at all the sensibilities of the soul, as strongly as if it was a dead thing come alive again and walking at one's side. It had never been dead. It was telling one to think directly of it, and of nothing else, instead of searching its oblique approaches. If, as we have said, it is a wonder that the thought of the dead is not our eternal obsession, what, then, of the living? Does one ever forget they are alive? And the storming and shaking seemed as if it would never stop. This thought was a live thing held in the hand; it fluttered and quivered to the fingers. It spread its feathers on the air and even inhabited the mean lodgings on either side of the street, as if it were a bird beating its wings in the corners of the ceiling.

This was the ghost come back to the empty chairs. But, not only did it take possession of the waiting furniture, it was also the reasonableness or sanity of the heartbeat. This was its purpose and its principle, as time to the pendulum. And it took possession of the heartbeat, pulling like a great weight upon its action. It dropped, hopeless and unrequited, at the sagging of the path, and, at either height of it, leapt headlong into fire. This was such a quickening that its effects can only be symbolized by the horror of a bottomless chasm, lying between cliffs. But the very violence of this imagery dispelled every detail except the height and depth of its pace. Nothing extraneous could attach to that inmost impulsion.

By now, all of one that was alive was impregnated with its force. Every other purpose of life was annihilated. The appetites of wealth and renown, pity for the dead or the ill, not one of the powers of ambition or pathos could bear any comparison with this strength of emotion. It obsessed the faculties and directed their understanding. One was carried along by a force beyond control; and yet this had its centre in one's own self, near the shudderings of the soul. It was the emanation of something deeper than the ordinary sensibilities. It burned the soul and shook and shuddered at its ends. And it came again and again

## THE INSTANT OF MEETING

with every beat of the heart, whirring and tearing at the emotions till even their afterglow flamed up in its fires. Nothing was left of any of the fading lights, they all were heaped up and thrown upon the blaze. And forgotten voices, speaking again in memory, took on the tones of youth and talked in familiar accents. Dead ghosts spoke through lips of living flesh and blood, nor was there heart to pity them. All time was dead, except this present.

And, now, the flowers begin to grow. But, at first, we must find our content in the classical proportions of this contagion. It is the common adolescence, the universal experience, though its far-fetched lengths have borne more curious fruits than we see at present. If we run upstairs into the room, that haunted shell can give us no echoes that we did not know before, And, perhaps because of that, this intensity from which there is nothing to distract the attention, will blaze more furiously than ever in the past. Thus, fires burn better upon a cold day; and this emotion, which, in more autumnal times, has hung so prodigious a harvest below the window, may fruit itself to perfection out of our shapes of glass and steel.

But, for the completion of this picture, one does not walk alone. Up till now the agony and the apprehension have been entirely subjective in their origin. But this is soon to be complicated by time made actual, by the firing of the moment. It is only accomplished at the instant of meeting, when the action of the nerves suffers such radical changes that it can only be compared to a recovery of sight or speech. This desired contact can perfect itself in a hundred patterns, though they are all limited by what we might term lyric frontiers. For the conditions and ingredients vary in their proportion, but never in their nature; just as, in lyrical poetry, it is impossible to introduce new material because there is nothing new to exploit. The unvarying ingredients can be mixed together in new quantities, but no greater changes than this can be worked into that particular body of poetry. All has been attempted before.

## THE INSTANT OF MEETING

The stringency of this truth is manifest directly we consider the contemporary scene. The girls from the bathing pool are available in a hundred situations that have no precedent in the past. Every one of those figurants has touched the clouds and lived among the winds. It would seem impossible to compare their lives with those who knew the poetry of sledge or sail for the highest fulfilment of speed. And yet the emotional tension has been in no way altered by these changed conditions. The fury of this travelling between confined frontiers amounts only to a diminishment in their primitive powers. To be driven along a road at a hundred miles an hour in an open car, with hair streaming in the wind, even this intoxication of speed has not affected the pedestrian pace of poetry, for this has not altered nor quickened in the three millenniums of its expression. True poetry has, perhaps, no more share in this than it has in politics or in philosophy. It remains unaffected by detriment or improvement, just as it stays naked and unashamed below the bright plumes of the moment. These alter with the hour; even the fine limbs of the bathing pool, covered for so long and now revealed, have brought it no nearer to our hands. Such beauties only affect the surface simplicity of the open air. They have no other importance than that and cannot, by nudity alone, be the affirmation of a state of life that can never come again. The statue, as mirror to the body, is an anachronism. It has no more contingency to our lives than the belief that man was made in the image of God. The standard of our creation is the photograph; and, being deserted by the arts that we have destroyed, men and women are made in the image of the cinema and must mould themselves into accordance with those distorted canons, as if close to the faceted eyes and toned down to the insect brain.

Our subject has so many phases to be discussed. If the whirring and tearing of the nerves has now subsided there remain all the other symptoms of the living. This is our opposition to the Triumph of Death. It is only by symbols of life that we can defeat the enemy and postpone universal chaos. These purposes,

## ENTRANCE OF GILLES

for this reason, are tricked out in finery. Poetry and power of beauty are in alliance for these ends of romance. They amount to an alternative religion, having the same importance that religion used to possess as a bribe for quiet dying. Life was intolerable without those promises; and, having broken them, the world is no happier in their loss. Without religion, the craving for an intoxicant of any sort will soon return. Poetry and the colours of romance have no other purpose than that.

The first figure to appear after this preluding of the nerves is Gilles. This doltish, round-faced pierrot is standing in a kind of diurnal moonlight. For it is late afternoon, and sun and moon are shining out of opposite ends of the sky. The slanting sunlight gives the evening its colour of golden sandstone, as if it were a Roman evening, yellow as Tiber or the campagna, with stone pines for shadow. Such is the sunlight; but, all the time, the round-faced full moon has half the heavens to itself and shines above his shoulder.

Gilles is standing immediately in front of us, on purpose, as if he has been told to stand still. His arms hang straight down at his sides. He has shoes tied with ribbons, a white ruff, and a wide hat. Underneath this he wears a nightcap, or perhaps it is the white cap of a pierrot, for his hat is too big for him. So are his clothes. They hang loosely upon him, and look as if they had been borrowed. As for his face, he has dark eyebrows and a full mouth. And his expression tells us he is not certain if he can make us laugh. Mezzetin, il Dottore, and the rest of the company are chattering noisily in the background, low down, at the level of his knees, while a garden term smiles cynically at them from underneath the boughs.

But the figure of Gilles holds all the attention. He does not look as if he knew what to do next. He is playing the peasant. This is apparent in his doltish attitude, and in the fact that his trousers are cut short in order to exaggerate the length of his body. This is an attitude of the peasant; but the legs of Gilles are



LE GRAND GILLES, BY WATTEAU

*Paris Louvre Gnaudon photo*





## ENTRANCE OF GILLES

not really short, for his hands, though they hang down straight before him, do not reach below his coat. He is a tall, thin young man posing as a peasant. His arms should hang down nearly to the ground, so that he need not stoop to the soil; but, all the time, the waist of Gilles is somewhere high up, hidden above the pockets of his tubular coat. This is white as moonlight; while his sleeves, so as to add to the lie that he is a little man posing in clothes that are too big for him, have so many folds above the elbows that, in effect, they are pulled up and arranged there, or else, pierrotlike, his sleeves would cover up his hands. As for his ruff, it is for Sunday best.

His clothes, as we have said, are of moonlight, as if soaked in it. He stands for the artifice of night in this sunset landscape; and, at the same time, not for the darkness of that, but for its contradiction by the lit scene. This may be a pool of moonlight, or the light of candles on the stage. But he is nocturnal man, the creature of the lights; and if one thing is certain it is that he does not appreciate these garish colours of the day, this Roman evening and the resin of the pines. And then we remember that he is not the real Gilles, but a friend in actor's clothes, posing for his portrait. That is why the clothes are ill-fitting. .

In actual fact he is the young son of a friend of Watteau. But our episode of Gilles is as remote to his real personality as is this picture in which he plays the doltish pierrot. He is no countryman, but a counterfeit in masquerade, the yokel of an unlikely land, and not suited even to that. This thought gives us the foundations for our fantasy. The figure of Gilles, or the body of this young man with the clothes of Gilles hung upon him, is sufficient for our purpose. It causes light music to blow towards us from underneath the trees. This is new evidence; and, for a moment, from the stiff way in which he stands, we wonder if Gilles has his back turned to us, and if his face is a mask. Like the mask of Shakespeare his face is so round and even, so hung upon the ears. But looking again at the pierrot, those are live eyebrows: they lift, even as you look at them. He

## ENTRANCE OF GILLES

is so awkward and illusioned: his expression says that he will believe everything that he is told. More is imputed to him than he can ever understand, just because he has been painted so awkward and gullible.

A miraculous emptiness lies upon those moonlit clothes. And the inactivity of the pierrot is more telling in pathos than the doubled histories of other pictures by Watteau in which everyone is talking or making love to someone else. If, in those, there is a figure standing aloof, it is disillusionment directly shewn. It is the painter, himself, who would sooner look than talk. But, in this, the account of the illusions is still to be given. They are yet to come upon that unclouded face. And he will go forth to encounter the world, walking slowly and looking about him, as can be easily told from his attitude in the picture.

But, if it is not a world inhabited by his like, there have at least been others, both before him and since his time. For he conforms to type, or his mask of comedy would be inapplicable and of no meaning. The illuminating blankness of his image opens a whole world of conjecture. It is as if the painter has invested his figure with the positive angles of his own spirituality, has given him his own adolescence, not yet turned cynical. It is a portrait of himself in terms of sensibility; not a physical likeness of himself, but an image borrowed from a friend, hung with hired clothes, and given a soul. The history of Gilles could be developed in a hundred directions from the simplicity and guilelessness of his presentation. His predecessors, and those who have followed in his image, are the creatures of parallel worlds, existing in a time of their own and coordinated by an excess of sensibility and by a harmony of invention, or mood, which it would be easier to describe as a key in music. All their actions depart from, or return to, this predominant characteristic. The portrait of Gilles is the picture of them all.

If we do not find him again in the works of Watteau, his, at least, is the hand that painted them. It is a world seen by his eyes in which he will not, or cannot, participate. At the same time, it

## GILLES, AS WATTEAU HIMSELF

is a world entirely of his own creation. It has no existence outside his eyes, or beyond the bounds of his own personality. This has, in other parallel instances, been an aura almost as pungent and distinct as that given out by the actual handiwork of the artists in question, but with Watteau, it is probable that all the emphasis of his personality was put into his pictures. His own self was silent and taciturn. The miraculous emptiness to which he painted the clothes of Gilles could have been applied, as a phrase, to the blankness of his own personal mask. This is made manifest in everything that we know of his character. It is recorded that he seldom, if ever, spoke; that he could not bear to live in the same lodgings for more than a month or two on end, but had to change his address continually; and that his nervous irritability grew to such a pitch that he was no longer on terms with his friends. All this information is of a negative nature, and it corroborates the picture of himself in Gilles. It is the portrait of a silent young man who will not amuse his audience by anything that he says. As a comedian, he has more subtle secrets to communicate than those of the spoken word.

We find Watteau in search of these same secondary effects behind the volubility of the theatre. It was not the spoken roles but the things left unsaid that interested him. The actors transported to a world of real luxury and beauty, instead of its counterfeit: the creation of the painted scene into authentic fountains and porticos of true marble: this was the contrast in which he found poetry and subject. Or by the figure of Mezzetin, playing the lute to so elegant an assemblage that, either his stripes are alien to those rustling silks, or he is but the theatre's echo, a mock actor playing at poverty under the green trees.<sup>1</sup> Something of inherent falseness, and, perhaps, the noise of their distant chatter, makes us prefer the Gilles to most of his other pictures. Watteau, himself, would have disliked their talking: but, perhaps, he drew his inspiration out of their enviable carelessness, or from the happy triviality which let them pursue

<sup>1</sup>This picture of Mezzetin is in the Wallace Collection.

## GILLES, AS WATTEAU HIMSELF

their pleasures against the grave and melancholy beauty of his setting.

But it is better to let the figure of Gilles lead us, mandoline on back, out of this particular prospect and away from his diurnal moonlight. He walks like someone wandering from place to place, without a mission. He is an itinerant, so deep as the soul goes. What is essential to him is his silence; not because there is nothing to say, but because there is no time to say it. His silence is the narration of what he sees before him; and, as much as he gets involved in life, to that extent will he suffer and lose the power of his isolation. These are the hard conditions of his talent; but its rigours reside in the cruelty by which his predilection is for the things most inimical to his being, and in which he is most unlikely of success.

This is his predominant nature, and its corollary is that he should exhibit his tainted health in his craving for the superficialities of life. It is those things that make life different from death that he desires. This is his dual nature; for the consumptive artist, of whom Watteau is typical, clings to the symbols of life just because he has so slight a hold upon them. He is the mute spectator: and yet, in other similar cases, their dual nature has made them contradict this silence. They have been participant, as well as audience. We must expect, therefore, to find Gilles in changing moods, some silent, some talkative.

The first excursion, following his figure, takes us along the springing boards of a seaside pier. They are theatre boards, laid end to end, and leading to a wintry sea. This surges furiously round all four sides of the pavilion, even underfoot among the rusted bolts and stays, back towards the cliffs. The empty pavilion, that theatre on the water, rocks to and fro and shudders from the waves. Their impact is like thunder, under earth, among the iron columns. This is, in fact, the winter to those summer pleasures of the sea. The pavilion is closed, with rusted padlocks, and windblown posters announcing last year's actors. I remember peering through any crevice between the

## AN INTRODUCTION TO ARTIFICE

planks in order to see into the theatre, but all was darkness, and from the crashing of the waves below the floor that dark pit might have been the cauldron of the storm. It was useless, all was darkness: but, close at hand and on every side, the penny-in-the-slot machines shrouded in tarpaulin looked like statues of gods moved here for safety while their temple was repaired or closed. Their hooded shapes were rough images of man and made the only population of the deserted boards. The wind kept up its shrill alarum, howling at all four corners of the building, and shrieking ceaselessly out of the upper air where there was no screen from its noise, no angle of wall to come round into its full force.

This was a first experience out of many to follow. But no more dramatic introduction to artifice could be imagined than this closed theatre in the middle of the sea. The howling and raging of the storm, the torn posters dragged to ribbons, with the names upon them whipped continually in the wind, all this violence and hatred sounded in the gale. And when it was time to go back, and the northeaster pushed one with wild strength before it, towards the cliffs, it was as if a dire warning dragged one by the scruff of the neck back to the town. The long line of empty lodging houses, up above, were delaying their lights from economy, but the lamplighter was on his rounds, and the meticulous drabness of spark after spark as it glowed into incandescence was a reminder that even prisons have to be lit as to their corridors and passages. The world of artifice lay, locked in darkness, out upon the sea. It was surrounded with insuperable difficulties, only approached by that tenuous and trembling bridge, and, when attained, was found closed for the winter. Indeed, every symbol of difficulty and disappointment attached to that haunt of low wages and cheap admission.

Perhaps the illusion would have lost its strength had the pavilion been playing to the crowd in a placid, summer sea alive with pleasure boats. But its persecution, dragged along on the skirts of the storm, and only remaining stable because it was

## · WATTEAU IN THE THEATRE

clamped with iron to the rolling sea floor, made its situation dangerous and pitiful. The lighthearted airs of summer were imprisoned in darkness and cold upon the tides. Even the imagination could not release them. And it might be thought that, in the season, they despised their audience as much as they hated this chrysalis sleep behind padlocked doors. All their hardships evoked sympathy.

Every person of a parallel creation must have experienced some such admission into artifice. Watteau, the animator of this empty-clothed Gilles, met his experience among the Italian comedians. His master, Claude Gillot, designed stage scenery and costumes, and Watteau in his young days must often have accompanied him to the theatre. It was then that he fell in love with the beautiful dancing girl La Montague. Soon after this the Italian players were banished from France, only to be recalled again after long absence by a decree of that libertine, the Regent Orleans, in the very first year after the death of Louis XIV, and, so to speak, at the earliest opportunity possible. The portrait of Gilles dates from this recrudescence of the Italian theatre. The imaginative blankness of that expression and of those empty clothes will have been meditated during his long absence. This return of artifice enriched the drab reality; and yet, by painting comedians among the figures who were the creations of his own imagination, Watteau, in effect, was but descending to realism. This is one of the contradictions of which we have been warned. It is a contributory truth to that negative impression given out by the locked pavilion in the storm.

But, now, we must animate our puppet. He must be given fine clothes and a soul. The moonlit colour, we keep, for it is a necessity to every scene in which he will be found; and whether the situation is high noon or the light of the chandelier is immaterial to his unchanging character. That never varies, however much the phases of his adventures may differ. He is always, to some extent at least, the victim, adding unnecessary burdens to himself which are the results of his own sensibility. He is ever

## CHARACTER OF GILLES .

wearing other people's sorrows as well as his own. These become as material a part of himself as his clothes; but, on the other hand, they could never have been incurred had he not been able to taste the amenities of their lives. If he had been altogether outside their community the necessary contact would have been impossible. At the same time he never really mingles with them. He only comes near enough to understand, and is never mistaken for one of their number. An unalterable law decrees that they forget him as soon as he has gone. He is tolerated for his silent company: but his absence is never remarked upon. And, after a hundred appearances, they do not recognize him when he returns.

We will make him tremble. He is acutely sensitive and silent from feeling. The feat of living in a world coloured so entirely by his own imagination has exhausted his energies. He is outside life, and the spectator of an artificial world which is his own projection. But the very conditions which he has heightened into such a register of feeling make his queries unanswerable and his own existence impossible. The realist world has rejected him, while the world of his own making will soon fail him. It could never be: and, even had it been possible, he would have grown to hate it just when it turned to success.

But we must find him in the moment when he still has belief in the colours of that spectrum. His sensibility is the support of the scene, which would collapse, but for his violence of nerves. It is a heightening of all the qualities, with no exaggeration of their parts. The image is shewn in extreme clearness, without distortion. This is the transcendental creation, the exceptional occasion. It will endure only so long as he has belief in it. Once that has gone, it is as if it had never been.

The figure of Gilles must be otherwise disguised for the interpretation of such moments. It is the return of the same person, but unrecognized, in accordance with the conditions that have always governed his appearance. On this occasion the setting is very different. His silken suit dictates a different air from that

## NOZZE DI FIGARO

blown and distended buffeting of the storm. He has become a small man, very thin and pale, with a profusion of fine fair hair. And the very breath of the scene is different; as though he could be imagined with his crimson pelisse and gold-laced cocked hat giving the time of the music to the orchestra.<sup>1</sup>

This is, in very truth, the flowering of amiability. Its creation does not come of innocence of spirit but out of harmony of invention. Childlike innocence is imputed to him, but here is no inexperience. Rather it is wantonness, with gilded wings. The characters have shed their innocence and are unsullied. The blossoming of this happy clime has been achieved by a simplicity of surface under which it is literally impossible to detect the workings. But, as ever, the creator remains outside the world of his making. The means by which this perfection has been accomplished are so delicate as to defy description. More than anything else they are the niceties of perfect proportion. Nothing is slurred or hurried. The characters are so completely dramatized that not a phrase nor a bar of music could be transferred from one personality to another without vitiating the entire structure. All the fabric would ring false, so much does the situation rest upon the moment. The phrases of Figaro or Cherubino become their property and their own interpretation from the opening of the first syllable. They could belong to no one else. And the same thing applies to every single character in the play.

The 'letter song', most lovely movement of the whole opera, is the complete illustration of these mysteries. It is a duet for women's voices, to the words 'quel soave zeffiretto'. By the simplest of means an Arcadian tranquillity is established. It is the answer to a love-letter, agreeing to a meeting in the moonlight of the garden. Probably such a lovely air has never been written, unless it is any one out of a dozen others in the same opera. It rises and falls like a light wind in the leaves. But behind it, underneath its surface simplicity, there is profound and hopeless

<sup>1</sup>Mozart at the first performance of *Nozze di Figaro*, in Vienna, in 1786. Cf. Michael Kelly's *Reminiscences*.



## L'EMBARQUEMENT POUR LA CYTHÈRE

agitation. No otherwise could it have sprung in such purity upon the air. It had to be born of an agony of the sensibilities. It is an escape into the Elysian; yet, at the same time, it is the work of a cynical mind that has found how to give pleasure, and that has no beliefs.

If we return, for a moment, to the animator of our original Gilles, it is because the most famous picture by Watteau is his *L'Embarquement pour la Cythère*, a parallel invention accomplished upon a scale that is, at least, larger in size than this short moment of song. And, to make the comparison more easy, Watteau painted two different versions of this same picture.<sup>1</sup> It is conceived, as to both variations, in a fantasy that shows the influence of Rubens and Veronese. The ladies and their cavaliers are coming down from a knoll of land in order to embark upon a gilded barge. It is an inland sea, painted with eyes that never looked upon the Mediterranean, but the cliffs and mountains roll away into the distance as in *The Rape of Europa*.<sup>2</sup> In the later version of the picture the trees are much fuller in shape, the statue of Venus has been developed from a mere garden term into a whole group of Venus and Cupid, while the waiting barge has been enlarged and furnished with a gilded mast.

No subject could be more poetical or more sympathetic in invention: but, as a picture, it has failed. This great artist has painted it in a vein of pleasant and placid regret, with no under-agitation. It has no poignancy. It is pleasing, but not paradisiacal. Standing before this alleged masterpiece it is easier, for the first time, to understand how it was that Watteau, great painter that he was, passed for a time out of serious consideration. In all five volumes of *Modern Painters*, there is, for instance, not a single mention of the name of Watteau. And, for

<sup>1</sup>The first version, now in the Louvre, was painted in 1717 as his presentation on appointment to the Academy; later on Watteau painted the other and fuller version which passed into the collection of Frederick the Great and is still to be seen at Potsdam.

<sup>2</sup>By Paolo Veronese, in the Doge's Palace at Venice.

## THE ITALIAN AIR

our own purpose, it is useless to compare this picture with that of Gilles. The attempted comparison between it and the 'letter song' from *Nozze di Figaro* has only been made with negative intention, in order to attest those qualities that we admire by a parallel instance from which they are entirely absent. On the part of Mozart, the continual deception of his illusions about success and the fact that he was less, instead of more, famous at thirty than at ten years of age, combine to give a magical pathos to those moments in which he treated of illusory happiness. By his gifts, he had both more means and less chance of attaining it than mortal man has ever possessed. This it is that makes some moments out of this opera into an almost unearthly experience of sensibility; but the picture of Gilles is no less moving, and its presentation, which is necessarily and purposely left empty, leaves us the freedom to complete his adventures.

It is to be remarked that although his invention was due to Watteau the figure of Gilles does not appear in poetry until Verlaine. But, if his mask is developed along the lines that we have tried to follow, he becomes a personage of Ossianic or Byronic import. In the same way that Delacroix is explained in Byron, or Berlioz in Virgil and Shakespeare, the secrets of such loveliness as that of the 'letter song' are more easily comprehensible if we admit that the composer was 'possessed' by this mood of peculiar sensitiveness. The mechanical origin of such tunes may have been the school of Naples, Cimarosa, Paisiello, and their ancestors, but these humdrum antecedents have been heightened and transmuted until, in the perfection of their metamorphosis, they bear no resemblance to those light and easy clichés. Nevertheless, they are the concentration of that Italian air; imputing more to that, perhaps, than it ever possessed, just as, in the picture of Gilles, the genius of the artist has invested this lay figure with a whole world of dormant anecdote, the importance of which lies in the fact that it is not expressed but left to the imagination.

This, again, is the difference between Mozart and Rossini. In

## IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA

*Il Barbiere* the jet of invention never fails for an instant. Tune succeeds tune in wonderful profusion, but it seems as if their inspiration was too suddenly meditated. They follow their own shapes; and, if it does not happen to hit the character, an air will make its own pattern, exult in it, and die. This impedes the characters, and delays the action of the play. The tunes appear to be created from within themselves, and are not the work of someone standing far enough away from them, to guide their lines into exactly the forms that he desires. There are instances, in *Il Barbiere*, in which the success is complete; the serenade below the window; the entrance of the Count disguised as an officer; the scene of the music lesson; the songs for Don Basilio; and a little masterpiece, the song for a housemaid, which is often omitted from the last act.

When Rossini wishes to suggest the flowering of simplicity he proceeds by an extraordinary burgeoning, an elaborate fancifulness. His pastoral tunes, or airs of innocence, are of peculiar invention. There is nothing that resembles them. Their world is not of chastity, nor its opposite, but of a half-comic reticence. Rossini was an Italian of the street: his music is music of the street, where that of Mozart is music of the palace. Behind the cadence of the recitative, childish innocence is overlooked, as it might be from the next house, by the characters of the *parocchia*, people drawing water from the same well and attending the same early Mass. Dr. Bartolo or Dandini is never farther than the fine house at the corner. So urban is the scene that the recitative seems to furnish the bare boards, putting fruit-stalls in the marketplace, or chairs and tables in the empty room. Nevertheless, the airs, when they are announced, unroll themselves like a little garden or a set landscape into which the character must step as soon as the music opens to meet her. The song seems to be an extension of the character, more than, as in Mozart, its necessary and indispensable expression. It is an addition to the character, which lapses upon the conclusion of the song, however charged it may have been with true and fanciful

## IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA

effects throughout its duration. Some of our readers may remember, in this connexion, the bucolic air of the heroine in the first act of *Cenerentola*. This is a perfect case in point; for her character, instead of developing through the opera, has that one exquisite moment, but never sets foot again into that world of fantasy.

The contemporaries of Rossini seem to have had a perfect appreciation of his merits and his shortcomings; for, in their day, it would be impossible to exaggerate the effect of such astonishing melodic invention. These sudden excursions were awaited with breathless excitement by the audience, while their punctual appearance at nearly every moment expected of them was not the least part of this pleasure. Especially did they admire his airs of pathos; and when we read that *La Gazza Ladra* contains the most hauntingly beautiful of his bucolic melodies we are left with the urgent desire to experience those sudden irruptions into another world. We know, already, how this genius of improvisation never loses his opportunity. When the moment comes, some fresh and faultless invention is ever at hand. They only exist for the purpose; and it does not matter if they only live for that moment, and are dead, out of the theatre.

In fact, the world has changed entirely since the enchantment and the gentle tones of the 'letter song'. It has become no place in which to find the underagitation and the tension of the sensibilities which are so integral a part of our subject. The art of the *improvvisatore*, even in its most wonderful example, is entirely alien to this silent deliberation. But the figure that we are in search of is never really distant and can be met with, even at this very time, if we take the trouble to investigate his circumstances. We have to remove ourselves from this region of easy success, however much it may, in the end, exhaust its creator. The limitations of the role make this necessary, just as much as there are conventions for the Byronic hero, so that the truth of his legend would be contradicted were he involved in situations lying outside those rules.

## JOHN FIELD

He makes his reappearance in the person of someone of our own race, whose unhappy circumstances and still continuing neglect are the guarantee that he is well chosen for the part. We shall see how truly he fulfils its sad prognostications. The copious return of this exiled talent, working through his influence upon other men, is another proof that he is correctly cast. This person is John Field, the composer of the Nocturnes.

He was born in Dublin, but the last years of the eighteenth century find him in London where, from the few lines that are the only description of him at this time, he is like the combination of Chatterton with Oliver Twist. In order to take lessons from Clementi he had been forced to become piano salesman in the London shop of that pedantic tyrant. He was seen there by Spohr, who describes him in his autobiography: 'Clementi kept him to his old trade of showing off pianos in the warehouse, and there he was to be found, a pale melancholy youth, awkward and shy, speaking no language but his own, and in clothes which he had far outgrown; but who had only to place his hands on the keys for all such drawbacks to be at once forgotten.'

Such would seem to have been his existence from his sixteenth to his twenty-second year. We can think of him wandering about these same streets of Soho, in the same mood, at the same age, and in the same years, that de Quincey describes so wonderfully in the *Opium-Eater*. Even now, it is impossible to walk from Oxford Street, down Soho Street, into Soho Square, without thinking of the ghost of the Opium-eater waiting at the corner, just out of the roaring of the wheels. Perhaps the only other inhabitant of London who would have understood him, worked, or rather dreamt, in the piano warehouse, near at hand. They should have known each other, at once, from their shabby clothes. And, indeed, in all that enormous city, if we think of it, there was no one else in those years—no other person who would turn such long silence to account. But de Quincey was, in a sense, far less isolated: he was one of a more numerous company, whereas, of musicians,

## JOHN FIELD

there were none. The prospects before Field were truly and literally hopeless, where England was concerned.

This seems to have been obvious to him for, when Clementi left London, Field moved abroad and settled in St. Petersburg as teacher. He had, in fact, to proceed to the other end of Europe in order to earn a living. Here, for a time, he was more fortunate, for we are told that his lessons were much sought after and extraordinarily well paid. It was the St. Petersburg of Alexander I, with its stucco architecture newly painted and stretching into infinity. But the classical porticos were contradicted by snow, and the colonnades on bright winter days were enlivened with figures inappropriate to these Roman vistas. This was his background and he was known, by now, as 'Russian' Field from his identification with the northern capital. Perhaps because of his comparative success in Russia, he was impelled, after living there for nearly thirty years, to return to Western Europe. He gave concerts in London and Paris, but in Italy, at Milan, Venice and Naples, his playing did not please the aristocratic audiences and his concerts did not pay. He began to be marked for disaster. Habits of intemperance grew upon him, he suffered the agonies of fistula, and his situation at Naples became worse and worse. He lay in hospital for nine months in the most deplorable condition, from which, at last, a Russian family named Romanow rescued him, on condition that he went back with them to Moscow. He was heard again in Vienna, where he elicited transports of admiration by the exquisite playing of his Nocturnes. But his health had gone. Hardly had he arrived in Moscow than he succumbed, in the summer of 1837.<sup>1</sup>

This, in the barest detail, is the history of the neglected composer whose exiled talent, as we have said, was to reappear again with so profound an effect upon posterity. It is, perhaps, excusable to treat his career in such detail since, now, it is all for-

<sup>1</sup>Shortly before this time Field is described by the pianist Marmontel as 'of the type of Falstaff. He was gross and fat, smoked without ceasing, and was surrounded by beer glasses and all kinds of bottles'.

## CHOPIN

gotten. On the face of it, a more unlikely talent than that of Chopin to have been influenced by an Englishman could not be imagined. Yet, this is the truth. The easy origin of Chopin is in Bellini. But another side of him, which is pure Chopin, is really Field. We have arrived, in fact, at a doubling of the role, and shall find the shell or husk of the one man inhabited by the soul of the other.

Chopin, from all the accounts that are preserved of him, was a person in whom the mental and physical qualities were allied as they have seldom been in the history of genius. His like has never existed before, and will never live again. His facial appearance was the exact counterpart and complement to his music. It is this harmony of image which has given him such unique and finished personality. He seems to have arrived in Paris, completely himself at twenty years of age, and incapable of improvement. The full expression of his talent lay before him but not its expansion, for that was not possible. And his music, in its contact upon humanity, was not an influence but an effect. He left nothing which could be developed further by other hands, for the utmost depths of it had already been attained. It ceased altogether at his death. Seldom, indeed, has death marked so complete a cessation. He was not one of a school, nor the solitary genius among a number of talents, but the unique and ineffable consummation of himself, and himself alone. It is, therefore, a spectacle of extraordinary interest to watch the absorption or coalescence of these two masks, for the one has gently devoured the other.

We know this of Field, that he was a pianist of exquisite sensibility. His position of isolation as the one musician of British birth during some two centuries of their non-existence makes but more mysterious the origin of those traits of Chopin, of the essential Chopin, which are present in the one and predominant in the other. For the Nocturnes of Field yield immediately and at the first hearing the personality of Chopin; they are its full-born, and not embryonic, antecedent. Only those of Field have a

## CHOPIN

chastity which Chopin has ever so slightly corrupted. The Nocturnes of Chopin were more dramatic, more sensual.<sup>1</sup> And perhaps the character whose nebulous adventures we are pursuing has no better counterpart than in the shade of Chopin which we can refer back, even if mildly transmuted, to this forgotten exile from our own land. It was through the medium of that more complete personality that this myth of Gilles, this nocturnal adolescent compounded of the English poet, of Chatterton, of Oliver Twist, of every romantic youth blessed with poetry and cursed with consumption, becomes a figure of Byronic or Faustian import. The poet of Sylphides is the projection of Field; only it has been hybridized into further varieties of colour by contact with this more fecund genius.

Of what it consists it is difficult to give an account. The Italian *cantilena* is essential to its texture. It moves upon that elegance in a world of drawing rooms. The long windows are open to the ground and giving upon the garden. The flowers are camellia, gardenia, magnolia, anything bell-like of wax, or like a rose of ivory or coral. There are no pictures upon the walls, for these are never suggested in the music. But weapons, for a note of gallantry, are the ornaments; and these scimitars and Damascus blades make the only masculine note, for the audience is a bevy of Countesses, like a stage direction in a ballet, like the Marchioness or ladies-in-waiting in *La Belle au Bois Dormant*. Chopin is the person who shocked another musician<sup>2</sup> because he would talk of nothing with Delacroix except his tailor and his bootmaker. It was his affectation to be the man of the world, a pose which was accepted and acquiesced in by Delacroix who, of all his friends, knew him best. Such was Chopin, in the music room; but, outside the windows, the jet of the fountain, the wind in the leaves, or even the scent of the

<sup>1</sup>This was Busoni's opinion of the Nocturnes of Field and of Chopin, quoted from *Ferruccio Busoni*, by E. J. Dent; Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 286.

<sup>2</sup>Berlioz.



## SCHUMANN

flowers, can be the male embodiment of this music, and if there is a figure in the moonlight it is that of Gilles.

The music may quicken to more fiery moods, but this nostalgia is ever behind its subsidence into calm. The spirit of the illness that was to kill Chopin in the end returns. It is as if, in the silence, the figure waiting outside in the moonlight came in to him, through the open window.

After an evening of Nocturnes, the next and ultimate metamorphosis of our hero lies in regions no less difficult of explanation. But it has this difference, that it is no longer solitary. If it is a walk by the edge of a cornfield, it has not been undertaken alone. The mood of poetry is only the background, as it might be the heat of the summer afternoon, or the haze of the distant harvest. For a lively discussion is in progress, and one subject, among many others, is sure to be the music of Chopin. This intercepts the cornfields and puts the Polish plain in place of them. The mood transposes, and the harvest flickers in the summer haze, until conversation turns again to little things. But Chopin is sure to turn up again, and so is anything else that they consider new. As for the company, it is ever the same; and even if some of their number have been left behind, because there was something better to do, their absence is expressed and there is the certainty of meeting them at the end of the walk. As many young men as there are young women are the characters of the play; and there is nothing exotic, or rich, or even unhappy about them. It may be thought that they are living in a big house in a village; except that, in imagination, this has to be near to every centre of life or poetry at one and the same time, so that it is difficult to place. They are profoundly interested in their own times, and feel deeply the fixed sentiments; sunsets, flowers, views, reconciliations. Naturally they are German.

Now what is peculiar about Schumann (it is his Arabesque that we have just been describing) is this same mystery of its imaginative origin. Of all the artists of the Romantic Age he is, possibly, the one who approached most nearly to the success of

## SCHUMANN

those ideals. Without the exaggeration of Berlioz, or Liszt, or Delacroix, he created a world, little though it may have been, that was without precedent. This is because his ideals were more proportioned than those of the other Romantics. It was Berlioz, we must remember, who said: 'I want music to put me in a fever and shatter my nerves. Do you think I hear music for pleasure?' The music of Schumann, it will be admitted, could not have been more different in intention. Yet, by a curious contradiction, it was from this very shattering of his nerves that Schumann, in the end, abdicated his reason and came to a complete mental collapse. Long before that, the signs of exhaustion were apparent in his music. It was a vein, limited in depth, but unique and irreproachable in quality. Once it had been completely explored, the strain of too much creation broke his health and destroyed his mind. His attempts to enlarge his activities into orchestral and choral music put too heavy a burden of invention upon him.

It is the truth that the finer works of Schumann are the last works of the old order. Almost before they were finished the contemporary world had begun, railways were built, and the pall of factory smoke began to obscure the sky. The conclusion of this period in his music is marked by the year 1838. It was during the four or five years preceding this that *Carnaval*, the *Fantasiestücke*, the *Faschingsschwänke*, the *Novellettes*, and *Kreisleriana* came to be written. They represent an astonishing burst of inspiration, and the later Schumann is hardly to be connected with their imaginative glories. It is like the prolongation of a season of fine weather that can never occur again. It is a holiday prolonged late into the autumn of long evenings. Perhaps, as we have hinted, it is the last stay of time against the new and ugly world.

This illusion that the music concerns a company of young men and women is borne out by the characters of his invention, with whose names he signed his musical articles and criticisms. It gives a sort of skeleton or framework for his images to rest

## FANTASIESTÜCKE

upon, and the music describes their moods and adventures. This is the means by which his pieces are so familiarly inhabited. And the world of their apprehension holds nothing extraneous from them. They are as much confined in it as were the youths and maidens of Boccaccio in their Florentine villa.

In the *Fantasiestücke* these imaginings become solitary again. It is as if only one person at a time is concerned in them. The other characters have gone out, or the ego of the music is by himself and will not come indoors to join them until the last light has gone out of the sky. We know that the twilight was Schumann's favourite time to play. He would ask anyone who wished to hear him to come when the dusk was falling; and then, so long as they were silent, and he could not see them, he would play to them. This much can be read easily into the lovely *Des Abends*. Other pieces in the *Fantasiestücke* are like the meditations of that moment. The poetry of *Aufschwung* is all the Romantic Age expressed. It is like a whole personality, a character seen entirely out of this company, but shown in his thoughts. Thus it is the summer weather as that might turn to poetry in his mind, or any of the fields, or the trees, changed again to drama when we know that it is the interpretation of character. Again, the exquisite *Warum?* returns a different answer each time we think of it. *Träumes Wirren* passes so lightly and quickly that it escapes; while *Grillen* is a little moment out of this enchanted day, a drama in parallel and in miniature of the green leaves.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The *Fantasiestücke* were written for and dedicated to Anna Robena Laidlaw (1819-1901). Schumann seems to have been physically attracted to this young lady from Scotland. She was a remarkable pianist, and had played at a concert given by Paganini. Schumann met her at Leipzig and they used to wander, with her mother, in the Rosenthal (Valley of Roses), outside the town, looking at the flowers and rowing on the lake. This was the origin of the *Fantasiestücke*, and Schumann writes in a letter to her, 19 August 1837: 'It is true I have not asked for permission to make this dedication, but they belong to you, and the whole Rosenthal, with its romantic surroundings, is in the music.' Only a week before this, 14 August 1837, Schumann had become formally engaged to Clara Wieck, the future Mme. Schumann. The

## SILENCE AND INSANITY

No one else but Schumann has conveyed quite these sensations into art. And his power to do this lasted for only a limited time. It left him; and perhaps his breakdown was due to his feverish attempts to recapture this lost thing. Only at rare moments did it revisit him: in the haunted Vogel als Prophet (Bird as Prophet): and, then, in tones to which it is pathetic to listen. For this strange little piece has the fluttering wings, the little hopping steps of a bird; it has the magical song of a bird, but as of something inexplicable of which the key has been lost, and of which this message has come back that none can understand. It gives the message, can say no more, and has gone.

We see the completion of the picture we have been following in this dead silence into which Schumann had by now descended. This person who, in his critical writings, had invented so many pseudonyms, so many different voices by whom to give expression to the things he had to say, was beyond the world of speech. His inveterate silence was painful to those who had contact with him, and it must have been an illness of the nerves to himself. It was a silence from which nothing could rescue him. He was locked into himself.

In a very few years from now he is beyond the communion of his fellow beings. He never speaks, but is the prey of dreams and omens, and is drawn to table turning and spirit rapping. He hears the incessant sounding of one note in his head, or is haunted by tunes given him in his dreams by dead men. The ghosts of Schubert and Mendelssohn impart a theme to him, but he has no time to finish it. At last, he asks to be taken to an asylum, an appalling epilogue to those mansions of youths and young girls, all musicians or all poets, whom he had imagined and among whom he moved in his own youth, silent himself, but putting the words into their mouths. After one dreadful

Rosenthal still exists, but is no longer the same. It has been 'embellished with a marble statue of Gellert and with the busts of the composer Zöllner (d. 1860) and the philosopher G. T. Fechner (1801-1887)'. More busts will have been added since; we may dread to think of whom! Cf. *Schumann*, by A. W. Patterson; J. M. Dent, 1934; and Baedeker's *Northern Germany*.

## SILENCE AND INSANITY

night under that roof, when day came, he escaped half dressed, in the rain, and threw himself from a bridge into the Rhine. He was rescued and taken home to his family; but only a week later, once more, had to ask to be taken to a private asylum. There he lingered for more than two years, before he died.

That purgatory of brooding and of melancholy is pathetic to think about. For this was no insanity of grandiose illusions, it was silent melancholia. The humiliation of his mind, the wreck of his imagination, was utter and complete. He could no longer work and had to live upon little things, the salvage of happier moments, writing to Clara Schumann to send him 'the little tune that he had written for her, long ago, when they were in love'.

He was going back, in memory, to that time when the world had shaped itself to his wishes. Intangible things, formed to music, had flowed heedlessly from him, and half, or less than half of them, had he troubled to write down. There was time, without limit, lying before him and a certainty that the world would wear his colours and accomplish itself to his pattern. He had moved in a reality that was within himself. It was, then, that he had been insane, and, now, he was in his senses. It was his grievances and the disease of his brain that were real, the rest had been all imagination. And he fell back, again and again, into the memory of those false fancies. For that world had been complete and inhabited, if only by the shades of his own personality, given names, and speaking the words that he could never utter.

So this can be the last metamorphosis, the final episode of those adventures. The company of youths and maidens has to be assembled, this once more. And, although they think they are at liberty, though the shades of their author speaking in their actions has, certainly, his illusions of safety and independence, yet the wall is building behind them. They are the prisoners of a day: they are as imprisoned in time as the insects in a drop of amber. Their very existence depends upon our goodwill. Their

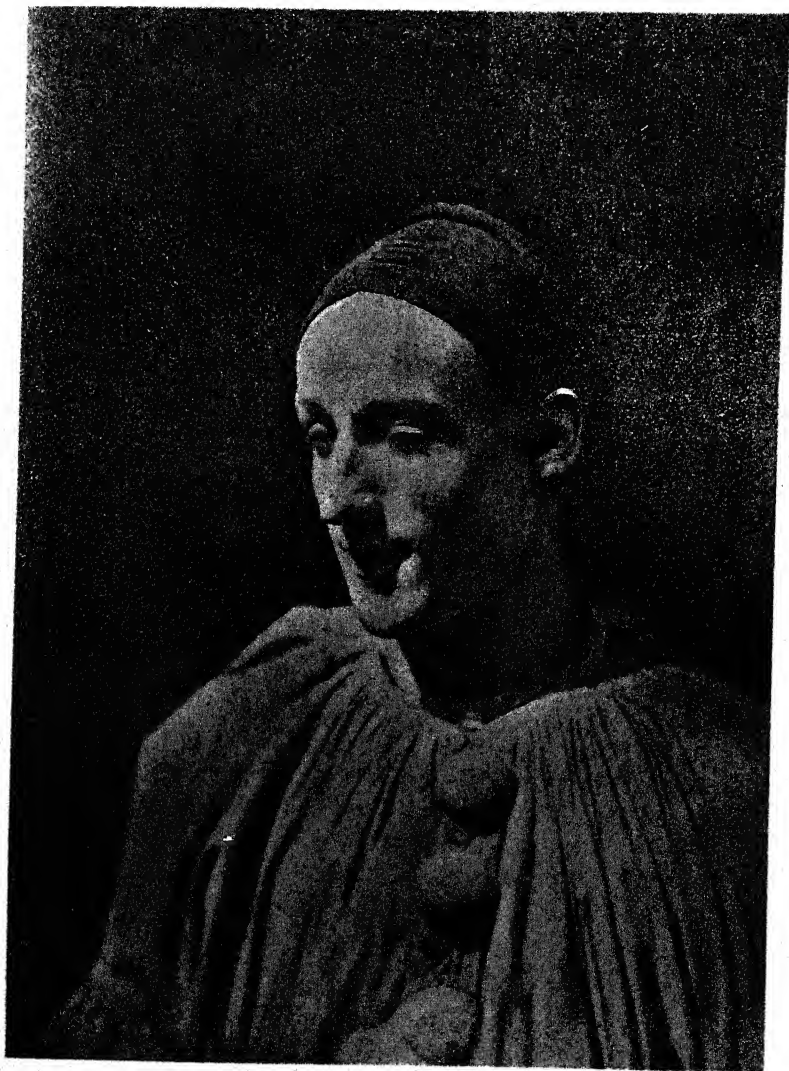
## DEBURAU

effort towards their audience can relax no more than it did in life; for they will be dead, once they have ceased to please.

Nevertheless the room fills again. It is not a moment before a long white sleeve comes round the curtain. A hand that can grasp nothing, no more than a wrist, agitates within that sleeve. The next thing is the white shoe of Pierrot, his ruff, and then his whitened mask. This is Gilles again, but he has been transformed into this pale identity by the great Deburau, the Pierrot of the Funambules.<sup>1</sup> His genius as dancer and mime fixed the type for ever. He gave the accent, the inflection, so that nostalgia knows no other interpretation than this moonlit spectre. He is the zany, the unwilling victim of the piece, an easy prey to Harlequin, who is quick and volatile, all leaps and spangles.

Eusebius enters, in his jacket of red velvet, reading from a book of poems. Florestan is impulsive and less serious. Compared with Eusebius he is forceful, but not at all in earnest. His character shows forth in his name. He is highflown and romantic, the actor of those roles that Eusebius only reads about in books. Chiarina and Estrella are no less different. Chiarina is masked; and, even unmasked, she hides herself from the world and is counterpart to Eusebius. As for Estrella, she will play with the emotions of Eusebius and pretend to understand his silence. But, all the time, she prefers Florestan who does not take any trouble about her. He is easy and unembarrassed. And, because Estrella is lighthearted and the same to everyone, Eusebius imagines, at times, that she understands him. But he cannot lighten his mood and she cannot become serious. The next mo-

<sup>1</sup>Jean Gaspard Deburau was born at Neukolin, in Bohemia, in 1796, being the son of a wandering acrobat. He was brought to Paris by his father in 1811. Very soon he had established himself at the Théâtre des Funambules, in the Boulevard du Temple, in the place formerly occupied by the famous Curtius and his waxworks. Deburau was an acrobatic and eccentric dancer of the very first rank, and was the idol of the most famous authors and artists of the day. As a young man his poverty involved him in extraordinary and fantastic adventures, of which the hardships brought on his death. He died in 1846, shortly after this early photograph of him was taken by Nadar.



HEAD OF DEBUREAU

*Paris: Musée Carnavalet. Photograph by Nadar*





## CARNAVAL

ment Florestan carries her off. She sees no difference between Eusebius and Florestan; or does not care for the difference.

Luckily there is someone even more silent and helpless than Eusebius. This is Pierrot, the cadaverous Gilles of the company. And if Eusebius is the mask of silence, the reverie and the contemplation of the author, then his true self is Pierrot. It is only his pretence to be Eusebius. He is outside life, and has been, the whole time through. One day it will fall upon him; his illusions will shatter and he will drop into the world and be lost in it for ever.

Meanwhile, the brave pretence of the music continues. Episode follows episode. Names are spelt out in anagram on the airs, as by the first letter in each line of a sonnet; and all the letters spell out Chiarina. Episodes of Chopin and of Paganini, like the fulfilment of sentences from Heine's *Florentine Nights*, possess the stage for a moment and are like the talk, that day, by the hot edge of the cornfield. But the broader rhythms of the *Davidsbündler* disperse those sentiments of a summer noon, and the false triumph, the stage success against the Philistines, to be so soon and so fatally contradicted by cold reason, ends with the discomfiture of Pierrot.

The silent Eusebius passes, unnoticed, in contrast to this more hopeless failure. Pierrot and the Philistines are confounded together in defeat, and the mounting triumph leaves him lying helpless on the ground. This is the fall of the curtain. Eusebius may escape for a little longer, but his place is with Gilles. And so these episodes of his adventures end with his figure lying on our side of the curtain, under its crumpled folds. His companions are playing for perpetuity; while he is for ever and always outside life, midway between the audience and the players, belonging to neither and desired by none. And his fate is foretold, as surely, in all his actions and in every picture that has been painted of his features.

### III PARADISÓ

#### 3. The Masqued Ball

If it be true that there is no invention that has no precedent, then these present pages must look for the father of their imagery in a quarter that has only a contingent, a parallel purpose, that keeps for only a very little while by their side and then debouches into directions where there is no inclination to follow. But it is, at least, one of the curiosities of the spirit. It was sentient. It had eyes and ears. It presented its contemporary world as a spectacle or drama in which its creator was involved, even if he would not participate. Its author, Restif de la Bretonne, was a soul in torment to himself. By extraordinary labours, too long protracted, and with the aid of his illustrator Binet, who worked to his minute directions elongating the figures and giving them the tiniest feet, as if to the Celestial fancy, those phantom women attained to the canons of Restif's taste and, in his books, an illusory world was produced, completely his own, down to the smallest detail. But it is not that which interests us so much as the intervention of Restif, himself, who appears in nearly every plate as the 'Spectateur nocturne', a cloaked figure in a wide-brimmed hat, always waiting in the background. He stands at the street corner, just out of the lamplight, seeing everything but hidden in the shadow; or is the one man, silent and unknown, in the chatter of the crowd. He is the solitary audience to whom the whole world is playing. His cloak and hat are his disguise; but, to ourselves, they are the sign of his presence.

The obstinate attendance of this misshapen figure becomes

## LE SPECTATEUR NOCTURNE .

more and more sinister as the book unrolls its vast length and displays its hundred and twenty engravings. Restif, a creature of the night, takes on the character of beggar, or vagrant, with a little money drawn from some obscure source, who never comes out by day but appears when the lights are lit and wanders about in the crowd, watching the spectacle of corruption and rejoicing in the impending collapse. He has scented the Revolution and heard the distant drums. This is his occupation, to study and to observe; but, while the rest of the world is asleep, he is writing in his garret, filling page after page of his chronicle with suggestions of how to hasten the work of corruption and facilitate disintegration and decay.

Where Restif had fortune on his side was in his opportunities for undisturbed observation. Nobody would bother to speak to him, or he liked to think that this was so, because it was not worth their while and because they could hardly see him. He was a bundle of rags, like the beggars on the benches. No artist has ever so humiliated himself, or adopted so menial a pose towards his public. But all he needed was a post from which to observe the world; and, so long as he was allowed this, he cared for nothing else, and, in compliment to him, we should not resent his conclusions or argue that he was wrong.

But, with this brief mention, he disappears for ever from these pages. He is needed no more, having served our purposes by an account of the convention in which he worked. Our contact with his ghost, now that we dismiss him, is dissipated into such a wide tangent of difference that he is traversing other worlds. The 'Spectateur nocturne' is wandering in a world before its fall; his theme was foetid with decay; but ours, even if it is only alive with nerves, has the resilience of that, and its swift relapses and recoveries. If we could believe that we live more than once our thoughts and reflections might run into other channels, but an exaggerated interest attaches to this solitary experience of life, since we have been unborn for so long, and shall be dead for so long, never to live again. The symbols of living

## THE BALLROOM

take on their primitive importance before this certainty of eclipse. And the first and most insistent of these symbols is the light, for it is tantamount to life.

Light! Light! There is a call for light, for all is darkness. Light! Light! It springs out of darkness. It leaps of a sudden into creation. And the interior is lit as sharply as by the white light of the storm. It is as if lightning played outside the windows and the world was snow.

This is the manner in which the room is lit. And, then, as suddenly, it is dark again. The next instant it is dim, the dismal half-light, and, by a series of little runs or steps, finds utter darkness, and goes up the whole scale into full fulmination of the lights. Every switch is turned on and incandescence echoes from the walls. All is light. It is to-night's ballroom, lit up for the dance, but musicless. Without music or dancers it is like a temple unconsecrated. It is a world uninhabited, as yet; an earth before the third day of creation.

An hour later and it is alive. It crepitates with sound; it sparkles, corruscates, trembling in its strength. The fire of all the lights is held as if at the diamond's point, glittering from the facets. At every moment more voices are added to the roar. Their din fights along the walls and hangs, like an invisible cloud, to the cornice. This is at eye level with the lights, in full dominion of their brilliance. But that hard continuity of sound and surface is the most secure shelter from the blasts of its own force. For they dart outwards to rebound along the walls, so that one's innermost self, as long as one is not talking, is entirely unaffected by the outward clamour. Here, the world is to be seen with all its attention fixed upon the moment, with no eyes for itself. Its members are the participants, the protagonists in the drama; and their public is limited to the solitary person who can remain detached from the excitement. But, given his success in this, he is armed with unsuspected powers. They can be compared to the thought sequence in a film, moving as nimbly as

## THE BALLROOM

that, beyond the frontiers of fiction. If they are even swifter than the changes of a film it will be because their feet are not cloyed with sentiment. Nor has the pattern to be completed according to set formula; it can have an unhappy ending, or, to be more like life, no blossoming or flowering of its shape, but an aimless dwindling, and, at the end, no question answered of all that have been asked.

Nothing, in these long moments, is a certainty. This is because of the unreal conditions and the crowded occasion, thronged and palpitating with the dance. Every aspect is volatile and changing. No one is truly himself. Their movements and interrelations assume the complication of an automatic drawing. The lines converge and intersect, becoming ever more and more elaborately involved. The centre or compass point of each pattern is one person's identity; and, if this is substituted with the holograph of someone else, the difference is immediately apparent, though the scheme or pattern of both is as similar as the automatic drawings to which they have been likened, and they show no more singularity, in essentials, than a row of fingerprints. They are exactly and completely alike, except to someone interested enough to study their details.

The presence of such a person in their midst is proof of something more than complaisance in these long delays. If that is so, this watcher or witness must own to some quickenings or stressings of the heartbeat. Not otherwise would he have the patience for this scrutiny. The hundred heads of dullness pass and repass before him. Somewhere in the crowd there must be the alleviation, the lightening of the long delay.

Meanwhile, the play proceeds. The astral bodies of this planisphere follow their expected paths. None but the watcher of their movements may note the pattern; but, to him, owing to some quickening of the heartbeat, it unfolds itself in allegory. The ball is no longer a dance in a drawing room. Instead, it becomes a state of the imagination. Out of this, as from a window into the night, one may lean to watch. But, as well, it is a con-

## THE GALLERY OF YEWS

dition of the spirit in which this lull of time is metaphor for every kind of lingering delay. The figures of the zodiac pass and repass, and to the quickening of the heartbeat comes a figure with golden hair. Her fronds, as if blown through and washed with fine sand, have the glitter that dank water could never give to them. But she is hidden, as to her true self, in her golden shell; and passes on upon her orbit. The crowd of masks jostles and surrounds her. On her disappearance the stressing of time slows down again into its normal heartbeat. The watcher is at his window again. This is the moment when the symbols or metaphors of the state of waiting exert all their forces and flourish into flower.

Their most primitive form is suggested in the imagery of a gallery or corridor. This achieves itself upon the nocturnal air, while that metaphor of the embrasure, or the window ledge, as of looking up from the gulf of darkness into a starry sky, shadows the lights and transmutes the scene into a break of moonlight coming through clouds. These loom inky black on the high, aerial winds, scudding before them along the torn sky. Black as stormy water, with the same ache of horror in their depths, while the moonlight, like milk or like lime of marble, dapples them but leaves them dark. This may be all night long, and silent with no sound out of the profundity. But, then, the thought of this and the association of those images, cypress-black and pale as milk, together with the motive and the person concerned, finds its appropriate place, and the scene darkens for the gallery of yews.

This is a covered walk, or corridor, of which the roof is formed from the overarching boughs. The yews, gnarled and hoary with antiquity, stand in an avenue and mingle in impenetrable confusion overhead. Nothing but this gallery of yews has that inky, sepia blackness. The cypress is as nothing to it. No light can ever pierce this gloom. So interwoven are the branches that even the starlight has no space between the leaves. What

## THE GALLERY OF YEWS

light there is, enters at the sides, low down by the stems. It is spilt, as it were, or poured out upon that earthen floor; and, at every hour, it varies with the night and day. Thus the moonlight, pouring in between the stems, is like the tide flowing through battlements of a fallen castle by the sea's edge. And, at another hour, it is noon outside the corridor with a light like honey, the gathering of the noon. No noises of summer come in through the stems, for there are no wings beating on that timbered roof. And the wind cannot reach it or disturb the boughs.

Such is the gallery by light of day, when heat may make the branches to be like living fur of some mammoth animal, but its moment, or interregnum, is the moonlight. This is its dominion, between day and day. The gallery might have been expressly made, or grown for this. Always, at the arch of it, a bat flies out; and, within, the moonlight is milky pale, pale as a waxen petal, and omnipotent. It litters the ground, and like the ghost of snow lies for the feet to lift it. There was never anything seen so pale as this. And slowly it drifts from end to end of the gallery, followed and preceded by the shadows of the stems. It searches each embrasure and every casement of the gallery; and, as it goes, the shadows of the yew trees go with it.

But there is never a sound, and only the evidence of the eyes can attest such things. Perhaps the waiting for this moment is the life and purpose of the yews! As for themselves, the darkness of their mystery is unrelieved by any movement. Here is no ilex, with the glitter of its leaves, but immemorial and pagan calm, the peculiar peace of an unfamiliar land. For this is at the edge of history, near to its limits, and almost within sound of the outer ocean. The yews survive out of an unknown antiquity, of which there is nothing left. They are a thousand years old, and more, making of their dark recesses the most perfect embodiment of those corridors or passages which form our metaphors for long delay. Their sombre length is the simile of this; and if any other reason is needed for the retention of their image it lies in their

## THE GALLERY OF YEWS

aptness of place and moment. They live in a peculiar land, and may be said to wait for this ghostly and silent visitation. It happened once and will surely happen again. The mystery of this mutual silence lies only in the goodwill or acquiescence of that moment. Once it has passed, there can be no happiness until it returns again. And, in this imagery, all is appropriate. In the next moment we shall find the justification of every detail. The shivered battlements lift their height again above the water. The moonlight will be a hunter's moon, tawny as flesh of nectarine or of apricot, lighting the October woods. It is this in simile, but not in indication of the season, which is perennial spring. And if we allow, for night, this autumnal moonlight, it will embalm the air, but, within the gallery, the light must be pale as milk, like the pale petals on the wall.

For the scene is of actual fact. This gallery of yews lies in a hollow valley, below castle walls. The towers rise a sheer height into the sky, with the tallest of trees only reaching to below the windows. To look down into them, in leaves of spring, is like looking into water. All along the hill the castle runs; and down, down the cliff below the trees, runs the river. It lies like a sword surrendered to the castle, laid down at the tower's foot, so straight is its valley bed. Sunrise and sunset are at either end of this valley, and the waters run out of the West. For it is the Blackwater, parent of the yews. That gallery is half above the river to the castle, and was grown long ago for the meditations of the monks, when the castle was an abbey. It is their phantoms whom legend places for the shadows of the tree stems. And, on the high walls close at hand, grow petals that are as pale as moonlight, for the magnolia, like cups of milk, is in flower among the glossy leaves.

This is the land of castles. They lie in fallen ruins or, resuscitated, are again a ruin. But not one other of them lies so proud as this above the river. The rest are red-haired wildness and the warrings of the septs. In a land with no beginning and no end, where the bogs, like inland seas, usurp the earth. Here



## LEAP CASTLE

are sweet waters of the seagulls, who nest in myriads upon the quaking mud and cry overhead, wheeling upon the wind. It is melancholy in midst of this, with the white cabins of the peasants far away and inaccessible through the sedges, and nothing but the mosses and the brackish pools and the freedom of the clouds passing over into the distance. But the Slieve Bloom Mountains lie against the sky, lifting their grape-soft colours to be the cliffs to this wilderness of waters, and we must look upon them, and forget this desert in the softness of their shapes.

On a road, leading out of nowhere to this ivied end, there stands another castle, built for the Slieve Bloom Mountains from its windows. It is the epitome of battlement and ivy. Long ramparts of ivy line the road and its tall elms are a rookery.

The forecourt to the castle is the very piazza of ghostly co-dominion, their Escorial and parliament. On all sides rise the ivied ramparts and the rookery is dark with wings. Daylight is theirs, for the only sound is ceaseless cawing. Below, the grass-grown court rises to the blackened keep. The ramparts and battlements are sham, coming from the *Tales of Terror*, and no less frightening for that. But the keep has stood ten centuries out of the red-haired septs. Its walls are ten feet thick, with dungeons in that thickness, and the cement was mixed with blood. Under the porch the red fox runs to earth.

The fearful keep, towering above this, is unshaken and four-square into the winds. For the rest of the castle was burnt black in the Rebellion, but the keep still lifts its bones, waiting for November, when every dog howls at the locked door, and none go to their homes till the waning of the moon. Legend brings the dogs from every village within sound of their bay-ing; but no man dares go near the castle, and it stands in the moonlight with lights at its windows and the sound of life within. We saw it on an April evening and unlocked the door. Inside, it bore the signs of fire. The high, hollow walls rose to the blackened gallery. But the mystery is above this, up a

## THE RUSH-STREWN FLOOR

wooden stair. And, higher, the steps are stone, in the winding of a turret.

A loophole-window, in the thickness of the wall, with width of an arrow, allowing for its quills, let daylight in. That sharp cone was welcome in the darkness; but, between us and the world outside, laid for an enchantment on the cold green sill, bare upon the stones, was a thing that made one shudder, of snakelike, reptilian cold, grey-green upon that green dampness. They were jackdaws' eggs.

The stair ended, at last, in a vaulted room, high, like a chapel, and very long. The floor of this was entirely strewn with rushes, as if for comfort upon a day impending. The flags were nicely broken, of an even length, and strewn in even thickness. It was done most carefully, as though in idleness on castle afternoons. Delicate fingers must have worked at it; and in the spell of this enchanted precinct it seemed as if the floor of reeds had been miraculously preserved to us as witness that the castle was still inhabited. They will have worked here, as at their embroidery, talking the while, so that the rushes knew their secrets.

The strewing of these rushes gave an extraordinary verisimilitude to every legend of the haunted castle. Also, it was the only touch of pathos in this dread interior. This was their last refuge. If we collected and burnt all the reeds their comfort, high up in this hidden chamber, would be gone. For they were safe enough up that twisting stair, and the rushes, alone, would not betray them. It was only the hidden senses that played traitor to this luxury of the bare stones.

And, thinking of their idleness, I crossed to a deepset window and looked through that loophole to the far-off hills. Below, the land was green, an unreal green, as if outside the spell of death. It was green, but empty, with not a house in view. And then, something of chill returned from the sight of a ring of trees low upon the hillside. It was a fairy ring, which must be full of spring flowers, though none dared pick them for the plucking of their stalks brought death; and looking back from

## JACKDAW PRINCESSES

that unreal land into the room I saw for the first time that the floor was littered with eggs. Clutches of speckled eggs lay every few feet upon the flags.

It was the dormitory of the jackdaws. At dawn and sunset the loopholes must darken and be shadowed with their wings. This was bitter disillusion. The strewing of the rushes was the jackdaws' work. At nesting time, a jackdaw will have flown back, every moment of the day, with a reed from the marshes. It was as the heron's flight, of long straight leg, this journey from the sedges, higher than the elms, and up into the keep. The breaking of the rushes into little pieces was their work, broken by the beak, while they held the reed's end with their claw. So the disappointment passed, in thinking of their employment in this convent.

And, then, the roof of the high room echoed with the clap of wings, for they had left their nests at the sound of footsteps and were impatient at our delay. The thought of these jackdaw princesses was not only the truth but it became the most fanciful interpretation of this rush-strewn chamber. On a moonlit night it would darken with the shadow of wings, and, suddenly, in some corner of the haunted room there would be the sound of quarrelling and the call of stranger voices than those that cried out from the keep, beneath. And here, also, as in the gallery of yews, the light came in at one window after another, as if it looked for something, leaning in upon the sill. Along the line of its light it would rest upon a sable wing, and the speckled eggshell would gleam like a polished stone, like a stone from a river bed, rounded by the waters. It would shine, and grow dim, and find the next embrasure, through branches of the rookery, high up in the windless elms; while, below, the whole of the ruins were reverberant and crawled with shadows.

Perhaps there is no house in the world that holds so many suggestions of the supernatural. Leap Castle has to be seen to be believed. It may be regarded as the Escorial of the demi-world. Even the most unbelieving will come away from it a little shaken

## JACKDAW PRINCESSES

in their denials. The intensity of this strange place exceeds in its details anything that the most dramatic mind could design.

The iron beds are still standing in the roofless bedrooms, with their rusty metal cracked and twisted from the fire. Something of sinister horror attaches to the iron claws of their feet, while the evident cheapness of these manufactured things is made rare and peculiar by experience, for the very claws seem clenched in agony. So they have remained since that night when masked men set the fire to these immemorial stones and sprinkled petrol on the carpets and the beds. The peasants say that voices shrieked out of every window as they left the blaze. In its collapse, it is as if no one has entered since that night. Most sinister of all are the keys that still hang from a nail, high up on the wall, where a fallen floor has made it too dangerous for them ever to be reached. No ladder could be leaned in safety against the tottering stones, and there they will remain, guarding their secret whatever it may be, until lightning rends the ruins, or, on some November night, the castle is fired again and, for the last time, voices come from the windows, out of the thickness of the keep.

Which, then, is most lonely, this castle or the gallery of yews? It is for no one to decide this who has not known their moods. But the image of that silence, and its problems to the imagination, causes this duality of place to be the pantheon, the place of burial or refuge, to which all the senses of waiting, all the delays and apprehensions resort, in hope of their contradiction and release. At no moment could this truth be more applicable than in the circumstances described at the beginning of this chapter. The protraction of every agony of longing, the waiting for a promise, once fulfilled, to be again accomplished; these are but metaphors, but shadows upon the hillside, in comparison with the dire reality. This finds expression in many things to which the pleasures of the background and the cynical music are foil and assistant, even if these must suffer slight exaggeration in order to assert their force.

## THE FALLING OF THE MASK .

The lonely corridors are most empty and forlorn when the rooms to which they lead are a blaze of lights. And the doors are wide open, or lifted from their hinges, so that the whole house is participant in the ball. These are the moments when, standing in the doorway, the shadow of the 'Spectateur nocturne' returns to the gallery of yews, or seeks in the imagination a scene as abstracted from the world as those precincts last described. They are the symbols, the icons of this state of mind, and they become as formalized as a view of Mount Vesuvius or of the Pyramids. They are taken from the pocket, and looked at, and put away.

For, now, the mood changes, and for the most simple of all causes. It returns from the places of death. So much as this can depend upon the inflection of a word. The pains of the poet give place to the triumphs of the lover. This, for its universal truths, is like the state of dying, or being dead; the time and place do not matter so long as the condition is assured. It is the annihilation of all other things; so that, for instance, the act of dying, which is the matter of a moment, an *entr'acte*, an interlude, a panorama, to call it by a theatric name, becomes of little importance compared with the bigger scenes that are building behind it. The moonlit castle falls into abeyance and we return from the gallery of yews.

It is, in fact, the moment of unmasking, at the striking of the hour. A masked ball, compared with one which is not masked, is as a room enlarged with mirrors. The unmasking, at the appointed hour, corresponds to the third act of the comedy. It is the moment, so dear to Offenbach and to Johann Strauss, when everyone meets by accident. The door of the private box or the *salon réservé* opens just as the rest of the company are laughing in the passage. Recognition is mutual: many suspicions are confirmed and there are one or two surprises. But the fact that no one has been left out, and that everybody is involved in the masquerade, makes it impossible for feelings to be offended. No

### THE THREE TRAVESTIES

one has gone home, weeping: it is a late night for everybody concerned.

This act of unmasking is as the division or watershed between two worlds. To one side of it, the waters flow down by sharper descent. For the springs that feed the same pools, by ease of accident, separate and do not join again. And thus it is at the dropping of their travesties. The falling of the masks occasions a living change which is the more remarkable when they continue dancing, unmasked, still in their travesties, and perhaps holding the mask in an idle hand as they turn to the music. In metaphor, this is a tree in blossom and in leaf at the same moment. Nothing is lost: they are seen in both states, masked and unmasked.

But the dresses of those two or three persons whom it is worth while to watch, must, now, be described. They are taken, in default of there being any possible improvement upon these, from the *travestissements* drawn by Gavarni, just over a hundred years ago, for *La Mode*. There are, in particular, three of them, worn by three girls. Like all things which are the quintessence of their kind, these dresses are not only the exact interpretation of their epoch but are, also, timeless, and tied down to no special date or period.

The three girls come forward, walking together in a knot, out of the crowd of masks. The figure in the centre is the tallest of the three. This gives her a more static figure than her fellows; and, as if to accentuate it, she holds in her hand a tapering stick, or wand, with which she walks in cavalier manner, as in the portraits of Charles I by Van Dyck. For perfection of this, her other hand is on her hip, and the bent elbow spreads out and supports her domino. This does not hang from her shoulder, but like an exaggerated mantilla it depends from a comb in the back of her hair. It has a curious pattern, which, seen through its light gauzy substance, where the pattern locks into the shadow-pattern of its other surface, might be a design of a pair of masks, or a pair of hearts, or even two pairs of lips; and this motive is repeated again upon the borders of her dress, in black and white



TRAVESTISSEMENT BY GAVARNI  
FROM 'LA MODE', 1831, PLATE 119





### THE THREE TRAVESTIES

upon the yellow coat. And, here, it has become flames or hearts, but never masks or lips. A flame-edged underskirt shows through the divided opening; and a long silken scarf, of black and red and white, comes down from her neck, crosses, without tying, at her waist, and ends in bows of ribbons at her feet. Her sleeves, beginning far below the shoulders, have wild flamelike and fluttering edges, of which the scallops become like icicles, like the drip of icicles at a fountain's brim, by her breasts. She is still masked; and her hair, which is drawn up into high curls at the back in order to support the comb and the domino, has a profusion of egrets, or of peacock's feathers, which float upon the air.

The other two dresses are more easily described. The one of them is more lightly masked; and after looking at her face the eye is caught by her silk stockings, in tartan stripes of red and white. These are the more easily seen because they are shown up to the knee, where a pair of baggy breeches, in tartan of black and red, hide the rest of her legs. These breeches are no less than a prophecy, in fine parody, of the idiot 'plus fours' of the links; but transmuted into an extreme attraction. Above this, she wears an overskirt of white, with thin black lines, the shadow of a tartan, but the shadow fallen awry, for the lines are square and not diagonal. It is like a white apron, and her sleeves are of the same material. The bodice is jet black and plain and high, so that the white sleeves jut out from it like snow. She wears a rose coloured scarf, and a hat which is the parody of a Highland bonnet. The attraction of this figure is irresistible; and it may be asked whether, apart from the genius of Gavarni who loved Scotland and drew its Highlanders and fishergirls, such a figure appears anywhere else in the arts, except in the delightful *Cop-pélia*, where the doll comes to life and dances, first a Spanish and then a Scotch dance.

The third girl is in red and white. She wears white trousers, of ankle length, somewhat in the manner of a pierrot's trousers, but they are edged with a double line of red, and only, like an apron, cover the front of her legs. If you look at her from the

### THE THREE TRAVESTIES

back, she is wearing frilled and ruched pantaloons of white, spotted muslin. Her waist is exceptionally small, and her white coat, triply edged with red, is cut into short tails at the back, which jut out above the muslin frills. The sleeves and the bodice are like the pantaloons and are tied with red silk ribbon at the shoulders. In appearance, she is the compendium of dissonance. She walks in a curious, long stride, and stands with her feet wide apart, like a flatfooted fishergirl, or a peasant. She would not pass muster, were it not for those pantaloons, but the beautiful thinness of her waist cancels out that lower heaviness, and everything is redeemed by her face and hair. That has the look of having been brushed or combed by being blown through with fine sand; and, for the occasion, she is wearing, inimitably, a hat which ends in a trailing meteor's tail of ribbon that floats far out behind her as she walks.

They are the Three Graces. They are different in everything, and no points of likeness exist between them. Remark that she who walks in the centre still wears her mask: but the other two girls have momentarily dropped their disguise, and this makes them into the lesser goddesses of the scene, though they are pendants to each other and to the figure in mask and domino. On her other side walks the tartan travesty, who is small and dark to suit the black and red of her dress. Her hair is arranged in a fringe of curls that are like the whiskers in a Persian miniature; and when you think of this it seems to change her expression and slant her eyes to almond or oriental, though, as soon as you look at her dress again, her eyes alter accordingly for the gentle comedy of her costume. She is the embodiment of the dress she is wearing, in tilt of nose and fullness of lips as if expecting to be teased at its quaintness, and so exactly suits the role that, evidently, it is in her gift to please the eyes with change after change of part and travesty leading to travesty. If this is so, away from these lights she will be neuter, neither one nor the other, but will flicker from shade to shade of those inflections, until character forms again and she fulfils a role.

## THE THREE TRAVESTIES

We have to think of these three figures as coming forward by choreographic progression. It is as though they climbed the steps of a temple carrying trays of fruit before them. This, at least, is the manner of the two girls who are unmasked; but their companion walks in the middle, still masked, and holding in her hand her tapering stick or wand. They advance in this way as if to the front of the footlights; or, like giant figures on the screen, loom large and ever larger until, by a miracle, they step over our heads without touching us and dissipate into the foreground.

For they are, indeed, the phantoms of the ballroom. Its unrealities are their dominion; but within its four walls their separate spheres extend out of one another like a perspective of smaller rooms or alcoves, green cabinets or arbours. Each girl, that is to say, is the centre of her own universe or planisphere of scenes, and the whole battery of apprehension and nervous anxiety is in ceaseless play around these situations till the most ordinary things of life become transcendental through this heightening of the emotions. No longer is it even possible, in absence, to remember the features of a face. For, like any other object that has been looked at far too long, the details become a confused haze and have to be seen again obliquely and from a new angle before they go back to normal. In absence, the very intensity of concentration makes it impossible to capture such ghosts; and, with cruel effect, they are more likely to appear when least sought for, between two words, or at the dying of a phrase, as sudden lapses again and all forgotten.

But, as well, there are the changes of the day. From hour to hour there are such differences that the truth of features can never be established. The looked-for thing may never be present at all, or it hovers for a fleeting moment and is gone. The more admired a person may be the less is she to be recognized in the different phases of her appearance. They can be as separate in their kinds or species as the whole assembly of masks; and, indeed, no masquerade could show more diversity of feature than any one of the three figurants for our attention, con-

## THE WHITE DAMSON

sidered in her changes. These are the multiples, as it were, of her personality, so that there is no limit to their extension and variety. And separate lives can be fitted to these satellites. The original can be substituted in its phases by the discovery of someone else whose whole importance is this reflection of a glance, or some parallel in lips or hands. In these embodiments, it is as if the myth of Diana and her nymphs was playing in perpetuity on the river-bank. That scene, at least, is to be preferred as imagery to the hundred-limbed goddesses of the Hindus, in whom, perhaps, the phases or facets of personality have only found a more animal interpretation and offered a more material choice. But, at this ball of masks, there is no triple-headed statue: the figurehead or trinity walks, as we have described it, in three travesties and a hundred shadows or reflections. The pursuit of these is as easy as it is to think while music is playing. This, indeed, is the purpose and reason of the masked ball, for there is continual music. And, if there is little to talk about, there is everything to think of. These are the moments when, standing in the doorway, the shadow of the 'Spectateur nocturne' goes back, as we have said, to the gallery of yews.

The primary cause of this return is from the associations of that one of the three figures who has already led us to this place of sombre shade. But, now, it is to other scenes; as if to the rocks or bones of that land seen in its primitive state, while the yews were young and red stemmed in the mist and rain, before the red berries came upon their boughs, before ever the waxen magnolia could flower upon the wall or the fashions of the summer influence and direct her ruched pantaloons and the washing of her fronds with sand. Instead, the bare bones of the land assert their primitive strength.

We see her standing, barefoot, under a white damson tree. It is at the end of a little wood, by a wall of loose stones. The boughs are loaded down and heavy as the hawthorn. The white sprays of the damson lean over the wall as if into another land;

## THE SHANNON

and here and there in the meadows the hawthorns, in crimson or in red, make a wild orchard and mock the half-tamed damson. Into their fruitless world the damson seems to lean, as if it, too, would be fruitless and unvalued. Its blossoming in the early year begins in freedom and ends in the frosts, when the fruit are shaken down and gathered. But, when the hawthorns lose their red or crimson, they are left in the field untouched and unspoiled by the hand. The barefoot figure under the damson tree is leaning into the world out of the wildness of an empty land. She is looking into the world from between the boughs, drawn by curiosity to the loose stone wall, and ready to run back, behind the damson, into the wood. This is how she has come to the edge of the world, and her flight from it leads back between the tree stems.

Beyond the wood, that primitive land lies clear in every detail into the prodigious distance. A wide river or estuary flows into the world and out of it before the eyes, not being out of view for as far as the sight can carry. The sloping meadows sweep down to the water and the world is divided, but the meadows stretch on again at the far side of it with no difference in their green dominion. That other world is out of earshot; no voice can carry across the waters. The far bank of the river is a mystery only reached by the coracle, but the same flocks of geese move in armies over the plain. The unreal colour of this pastoral kingdom comes in part from its own emptiness of not a wall, nor hedge, and no barrier until the far-off mountains. But it is raining in a dozen places at once under the wide sky, so that the clouds move in shadow over the open land.

And now, a goosegirl can be seen, near at hand, in a hollow of the meadow, while a shoulder of the sloping field shows beehive huts and a rough stone cell. This is the oratory of the saint, and a round tower stands above it, tall as a minaret and capped with stone. The only entrance to this is by a doorway high up in its circumference, so that the ladder lifted into the inside makes the tower impregnable. It is their belfry and watch-tower; and be-

## CULDEES

fore climbing like Stylites into their column the monks look for distant flames over the inarticulate plain, and, at sight of them, retire into that pillar.

In its pristine state this land was on the extreme edge of the world, lapped by the surges. The mountainous lift and swell of ocean spoke of its ubiquity out of the unbroken vast. In winter, the howling and roaring of the winds told the sphere of waters. And there were valleys or points of land near the sea that, even in the storms, had their peculiar warmth of clime, as under shafts of sunlight, so that they were little tropics and in their luxuriance of growth foretold the promise of the warm islands of the ocean. For this reason, and for its utter solitude, this far edge of the world had become a second Thebaid. It had more anchorites than the Nitrian desert. But the physical appearance of these ascetics is even more unknown to us than that of the monks of Egypt. Something of those phantoms of the hot sands, who were as hairy as the satyrs, is preserved to us in mosaics. But of this second Thebaid, and of the Culdees who were its monks, nothing is left but the bare stones of their cells. They must be pictured from conjecture, red bearded, and wearing robes of tweed that were dyed with seaweed and with the sea-shells of the bare rocks. These athletes in privation and self-denial spent the whole winter in the darkness of their cells. When they emerged into the spring light they must have come out like bears from their caves.

The monastery that we have described is that of Clonmacnoise, looking over the wide waters of the Shannon, but this was among the most accessible of their hermitages. The true character and extraordinary distribution of their Thebaid is to be found at the world's end, remote from these green meadows. They built their cells on islands among the reeds or, not contented with the misty inland seas, sought the ironbound coast. The holy men must have crowded in a drove, to the exclusion of all other inhabitants, into the Dingle peninsula, for it is more thickly strewn with ruins than any of the sites of classical Eu-

## THE GREAT SKELLIG

rope. Here is the oratory of Gallerus, no larger than a stone hut, but of distinct and peculiar architecture. More numerous, still, are the ruins upon Inishmore, the greatest of the Aran Islands, under the shadow of Dun Aengus, the cyclopean fortress. This was the work of pagans; and the terror of its antiquity, five hundred years old or more at the coming of the monks, must have haunted, even then, its tremendous cliffs, sheer above the ocean.

Here, at least, the anchorites had for company, a large concourse of their fellow monks, but the extremity of their fury of escape is to be found in such frightful retreats as that of the Great Skellig. This appalling rock lies nearly ten miles out to sea. The ocean sinks suddenly to a depth of ninety fathoms before it, and the rock is almost impossible to land upon because the Atlantic swell rises and falls twenty feet at a time in the calmest weather. The rock is only half a mile long and a quarter of a mile broad; but it rises sheer out of the sea, and the cells of the anchorites, in order to have enough level space to stand upon, had to be built at a height of six hundred feet above the waves. The unimaginable noise and tumult of the storm, in its effect upon the nerves, all the long winter through, makes one of the most extraordinary chapters in the whole history of asceticism. Probably not more than six or eight anchorites, at a time, supported this living hell of wind and cold, but it is evident from the remains of no less than five cemeteries that the Great Skellig had its permanent population who passed their lives upon the rock. During the winter, in the violence of the gales, it will often have been impossible to stand upright and the anchorites must have crawled to their chapels through the frightful voices of the wind. Their provision during the winter depended upon two deep wells of water, and it is probable that they must have kept a flock of goats to feed upon the lichen and the salt grasses. There were, also, the myriad eggs of the seagulls; but the anchorites can have had no other food than the dry bread, or biscuit, of the summer's baking, and often they must have been

## THE GREAT SKELLIG

starving when winter was over and the first coracle came out to them. It is difficult, indeed, not to look upon these hermits as spiritual ancestors to the lighthouse-keepers who are stationed upon the same rock and condemned to identical conditions. But, at least, their existence is the guarantee that there are ships passing, while, save for a raid once in a century by the Northmen, there was never a sail and summer was lonely as winter. Theirs, in fact, was one of the extreme situations, the posts of honour, as it were; and the whole of these scattered communities, down the rocks and islands of that iron coast, belong in spirit to the ascetics of the Eastern Church and have no parallel elsewhere in Europe. For emergency of site and drama of isolation there is nothing to choose between Aran or the Great Skellig and the rocks of Meteora or dales of Athos. And there were other posts just as perilous in the seas; Tory Island, off Donegal; High Island, off the coast of Connemara; the lonely and fearful Teach Molaise, on Inismurray in Sligo Bay; or the Great Blasket, of stupendous cliffs and terrific in grandeur; yet, of all these, none is dramatic as the Great Skellig. It is in the cauldron of the storm.

If, in the earlier Thebaid, the enemy of the anchorites was the heat, here it was the wind and cold. It gave them the force with which to wrestle, for their privation depended upon an extremity of climate. Without that, their athletics were wasted. Their first instinct was to rush into the storm. The spread of their movement seized, at once, upon such missionary sites as Iona or Lindisfarne upon which to build monasteries. But, in fact, the primitive state of this land is to be compared with the existing Tibet, or Mongolia.

The vast diffusion of lamaseries, many of which have never yet been visited by an European, and the very existence of which can only become known through the hazard of, perhaps, a stray plant-collector, a Forrest or a Kingdon-Ward, is a parallel in so many ways to the conditions that must have prevailed regarding these inaccessible hermitages of the West. The news



## LAMASERIES

of another one, so many days' journey away, in some half-independent principality, would be the same to a traveller across these moors and upon these rocks as in Szechwan or Yunnan. There, the absence of any central authority makes for an entire lack of information about even the nearest lamasery, two or three days' journey ahead over the snows. In our day, this is the most interesting undiscovered region of the earth's surface. It was only when he was within a few miles of it, in 1928, that the botanist, Dr. Joseph F. Rock of the Arnold Arboretum, received the first information of the monastery of Choni, a little independent ecclesiastical principality, of which the hereditary ruler was abbot or grand lama, as well. Here, the devil-dance and the butter-festival are celebrated on a scale of magnificence that is luckily preserved to us in the documents and photographs of the explorer.<sup>1</sup> The whole of that huge hinterland remains to be coordinated in a description of its architectural monuments, which are certainly most remarkable in photographs, even if, on closer acquaintance, the squalor and dirt of the lamas detract from the fine lines of their setting. All these lamaseries, indeed, considered together in their entirety over the vast area in which they are found, would require a lifetime of study. There are the interests and parallels of their strange ritual, the folklore of their beliefs and legends, the investigation of their black arts to be undertaken; and, not least, the different versions of the devil dance, as it is given in the various lamaseries, remain to be studied from the point of view of demonology, for the pagantry of its masks and costumes, and for the strangeness of its music and dancing. As if this is not enough, there are, as well, in Outer Mongolia, the nomad lamaseries, monasteries of which the name is known but the locality is uncertain, because they are never in the same place for more than a few days at a time. Their tents of felt are folded up and they remove to new pas-

<sup>1</sup>His articles, illustrated with colour photographs, appeared in *The National Geographic Magazine* for 1928. Shortly after his visit the Reds closed the monastery and deprived the abbot of his power.

## THE HERMITS OF LAKE TANA

tures. These are living descendants of Karakorum, the capital of Genghis Khan, whose great empire, stretching from Cracow to Peking, had no settled capital but this metropolis of the nomads, that moved from place to place over the plains wherever the grass was green. Karakorum, in fact, could be met upon the march, moving its banners with the Golden Horde.

The Great Skellig must fail inevitably in comparison with the simple and massive architecture, the bright colours, of a typical lamasery such as that of Choni. From the distance, if from the distance only, such buildings give an impression of tradition and style in design which is not to be found among the stone cells and huts of these outer rocks. The inhabitants are to be compared, but not their habitations. For a parallel in these it is necessary to go to another primitive land, still existing to-day. This is Abyssinia; and perhaps no nearer comparison could be discovered for our purpose than the monasteries and hermitages recently visited for the first time by an European on the shores and islands of Lake Tana, in the far interior of Ethiopia.<sup>1</sup> This lake, which is the source of the Blue Nile, can certainly be compared for its situation with the outer islands of the ocean. Low stone chapels and huts of reeds give shelter to hermits who are the exact spiritual and cultural equivalent to the anchorites of fifteen hundred years ago who dwelt in the sound of the tremendous seas. Nothing but an identity of conditions could have maintained this strange institution in its pristine and primitive force.

That environment is worth, perhaps, a moment's reflection. The high uplands of Ethiopia, through which the traveller must pass on his way to the lake, are the property of great feudal and tribal chieftains. It is a pastoral land, and the herds of cattle that graze upon the slopes are their wealth, dwelling between a diet of milk and corn and the banquets, or rather orgies, of raw meat, in which the still quivering flesh of an entire ox will be devoured, uncooked, until the participants attain to a state of

<sup>1</sup>As this goes to press, an Italian army has reached the shores of Lake Tana.

## AFRICAN WONDERS

intoxication of greed. Yet, if this is a land of cattle it is, also, the country of the lion. That tawny animal leaps out from the brakes upon the lambs and calves and is a warning of hot Africa at the dropping of the hills. On the shores of Lake Tana one of the frontiers of the world is reached. The anchorites, who are Ethiopians of legendary dark, even if contaminated by a strain of slave blood, are of the black Hamitic type, blacker even than negroes, but with noses like a scimitar and heads that are a shock of wild hair. The antique and unintelligible tongue in which their ritual is conducted, for they learn it parrotlike, and do not understand its meaning (it is called Geez and has not been the vernacular for a thousand years or more), this disused and magical formula of worship, together with the contact, fabulous in distance across the sands, that they have maintained for more than that length of time with the Coptic Patriarchate of Egypt, these things combine to give romance to all that has to do with the Ethiopian Church, and, in particular, to this, its most distant outpost by the mythical sources of the Nile. It seems scarcely credible that those fountains, which have been one of the mysteries of the world, should spring forth, in reality, out of the shallow waters of a lake that has, even in this midst of Africa, a community of Christian hermits dwelling upon its banks and upon the islands among its reeds. For the far shores of the lake are upon the very rim of the world. The mountains decline quickly into the wilderness. The Africa of monstrous races begins and never ends from there. Giant Nilotes, the Dinka and Shilluk of the hot Sudan, live at only a few days' journey, leaving the Blue Nile for its sister river, and, henceforth, all the imaginings of Leo Africanus can be seen fulfilled, for, if the plains have their giants, there are pygmies in the recesses of the forest, the duck-billed women of the Congo surpass every invention of the mediaeval geographer, and, in the waste south, the Venus Callipyge, coffee-skinned and naked, is the pleasure of the yellow Hottentots who drew her, inimitably, upon the walls of their caves.

## THE GREAT SKELLIG

It might well be argued that existence, for it is not much more than that, has more to recommend it upon the shores of Lake Tana than in the fearful isolation of the Atlantic rocks. There is the whole of Nature to look upon. The animals and the birds, alone, make a copious and profuse bestiary of daily experience. It is a furnace of heat relieved by the breeze of evening and it has, at least, the silence of the wilderness. It has, also, the warm colours that lie with comfort upon the eyes. The sycamore gives shade and there is the odorous palm in this land of frankincense and myrrh.

But the Great Skellig was in the waste of waters. Not a tree could grow upon that rock. The moaning of the wind never died and even if there was no storm there was the gnawing and sucking of the tide. Subsistence was not denial in the face of plenty but the economy of a perpetual siege. And the torment, or perhaps the delight of their privation was the sight of the mainland, seldom hidden in the mists. The wild mountains were of unreal green, changing with every hour of the day, and of so wide a prospect that the mind could never tire of traversing their aromatic slopes where every step bruised the mosses and the lichen. The sight of rain falling like a veil upon the hills was only the synonym of plenty, and, when the sun came, the colours were renewed to amethyst and emerald, to fires of glass. The mainland loomed appreciably nearer and lay suspended like a vision in the clearness. This would happen upon very many days when approach to it was impossible by boat. It had, therefore, not only the appearance of a vision, but, as well, its unreality and intangibility.

Sometimes, for days together, there would be no prospect but the spate of waves and the pouring spray, in salt and drenching rain upon every crevice of the rock. And, all night long, the lift and boom of the waves would beat upon the roots of rock, trembling in its pillar down to the bed of ocean. The howling and roaring of the air, blown through that funnel mouth from all the open main, was so loud as to silence the thudding into a

## THE CAULDRON OF THE STORM ·

reverberation, a subterranean thunder in the shaking vaults. Noon was no different from night, save in that light of water, until a day when with no warning the land came back, high on the horizon, as if it had lifted. This was the only enjoyment they ever had of its delights. For the rest, it was as if they could only touch the foot of it and never reach to its hands or face.

Upon a milken morning they would go down the steps of Skellig to the shore, but, as soon as they stepped into the coracle, the extremity of the descent would lose all but the towering cliffs, bastion after bastion with no land behind them. The beauty of the mainland was only visible out of their own austerity upon the column. Down upon the waves, rock answered rock and there was no solace but the shore of splinters, strewn with fragments, and shining in its weeds. It was two hours' row to the land, and, at last, there were men and women stooping still, quite still, while they looked for skale, or picked up shell-fish and held them in an apron. The view was sad along the shore. There were coracles and a few low huts: no trees, nothing but the crumbling of the cliffs, tumbled like a bastion and built among the ruins.

And this was all. There was nothing but the salt seashore. But, looking back, their column lifted itself out of the waters into the light of air. The bare rocks with the lichen upon them had become like a green meadow in the distance. An unreal light, in midst of this, played upon the stone walls of their little cells. The Great Skellig reached up into that same luminous heaven in which the mainland had lain, in the milken morning; but, so soon as the laden coracle left the shore again, it was a world of rocks. It was only the foot of the land, and never the hands or eyes.

They were vowed to it; but those who were more fortunate among the fields lived as in the first landscape where we wandered. We are back again below the damson. Or, for a last view of that world, it can be the Knockmealdown Mountains giving on to the vast plain to Cashel. This is on a scale of size

## THE PLAIN OF TIPPERARY

that can be compared to the plain of Cordoba, but not in its colour, for this land which has ever an Iberian parallel, though it may have the scale of Andalucia, has the division and the colour of Galicia. It is a land of little farms; and it is only necessary to allow the inhabitants their old language, which they are now relearning, to place this landscape upon a level of peculiar fantasy and remoteness.

It is a flight over the hills into an unknown country. The plain is humming and buzzing with little trees, which, in their far-down roundness in the haze, have the appearance of spinning steadily like tops. And their diminishment down the plain into the distance is a proving of perspective. The white cabins of the peasants show the population of the plain, which we must imagine for our purposes in pristine state, inhabited by the gabbling, barefoot Irish in their blue cloaks. It is thus that they must have appeared to the poet Spenser, who wrote the *Faërie Queene* at Kilcolman on the slopes of these same hills. That was the time of their massacre and extermination by the English; but, earlier still, in their prosperity, the plain of Tipperary must have looked from these mountains to be the extremity, or Ultima Thule, of bucolic plenty. What pails of milk! And how the bells rang in the water meadows, from the cowslip and the primrose, while the herds fed upon those flowers! Every cabin had its beehive; and the sharp sloe berries stood above the honey. Near by, would be the elder, and in its season the clusters, like black grapes, made their wine, for this was a haphazard land, walking barefoot under the wild trees. No one had time for a considered life. They did not plant, but on a fine day shook the boughs, or shed the hazels down. They were violent, to cruelty, with the branches, breaking them from the stem for a green-cheeked apple when all the others lay in their laps. They tore the limbs from the trunks and bruised the wood with stones. No one had a thought for next year, but only for to-day.

One year, the leaping salmon would come in surfeit up the

## THE PLAIN OF TIPPERARY

river, and another year, from the slaughter, there would be no swarming of the water. Their herd would be thinned into that miracle of a moment when the young fish, like a dagger hurled, spring, quivering, against the current. When in multitude, this sight is not to be matched in the dolphin-haunted seas. For, all along the flecked torrent, they leap and spring as if playing with their strength. They ascend in the sunbeam, and glittering in its colours leap up the waterfall and drop into the higher pool, quick hidden in the depths. They jump the rapids, up the falling water. They were so strong that they could only be caught in the millpond or the built-up dam, closed by wicker doors into a prison of quiet waters. In the time of their swarming, the slaughter was not stayed all night but continued by moonlight or by the light of flares. The fishermen moved from dam to dam along the stone breakwaters, lowering the latticed gates so that there was no escape, and every hour the nets were dragged and the gleaming fish brought, gasping, to the stones and bludgeoned. The sheen of their silver scales faded, even as they lay in the moonlight dead upon the stones. This catch of salmon was as punctual as the harvest and more plentiful than their reckless planting. They would eat no meat in confidence of this coming plenty; and in that glut of flesh neglect all other duties so that the cornfield became a waste of red poppies and the orchard a wood of wild trees.

Their disposition of character should be sufficient to explain the whole carelessness of that country. It is but half pastoral; in the sense by which in a play or ballet some of the roles are described as being of 'demi-character'; in a descent from high seriousness, but not yet of opposite intention, absolutely care-free. That professional term is the only way in which to describe this strange mingling of opposite qualities and the contradictions in everything that has to do with the history or the physical aspects of this land. For it is in all essentials unlike any other country; just as its inhabitants are a law to themselves, and the Great Skellig in its cauldron is opposed, only a few miles

## THE GHOST UPON THE STEPPING STONES

away, by moonlight, calm and sempiternal, in the gallery of yews, and by the magnolia, milky and incredible, in flower upon the wall. But, for its fullest illustration, and as point and purpose of these pages, no move need be made beyond the region of the damson bough.

That spray of white damson, it will be remembered, rose and fell upon the wind, and it was as if a hand held the bough and pulled it to and fro to the beating of its heart. It had become the emblem of the living being who hid behind it, and whose living phantom we now invoke from every evidence of our senses, incorporating her out of the water meadows where she walked, barefoot, in a wilderness of little streams. The high heads of meadowsweet nodded by her knees while the purling water was nearly hidden by the birr of wings in that honey-gathering morning. It was hot, yet very wet in the long grass, as though fine weather had but just come to the woods; and now and then a hind and her fawns would run out of a brake of reeds and hide again until the sound of steps drove them on again. But, ever and insistent, the birr of wings held the ear, unless it was the ringdove out of some tall spire of leaves. It was the birr of wings and the greenness of the leaves that made the day. And this was so until the river bank, where the noise of waters in the wide stream, between the stepping stones, showed there was a path through this paradise, and that it had a beginning and an end.

It had seemed as if there could be nothing finite to this park or pleasure ground any more than that a decline should ever be expected from noon into the slant evening. This had, in fact, every quality that attains to a world apart; and if, as was the truth, a high wall separated it from the rest of creation, there was some reality behind the feeling that even the very morning in the water meadows was a thing separate in itself, like a moment in time or a stage of life given indefinite extension and permanence. But, while one lived in this paradise, that morning,



## THE GHOST UPON THE STEPPING STONES

one was also born in it, and died in it. The curve or trajectory of its natural growth was concealed; and only the river that flowed in and out of its limits was reminder that nothing stood still. The water was hurrying upon the stones; and if the cold hearts of those stayed still and unmoved there was nothing else that would not pass on with the waters and, in the end, be lost. The noise of them, and their purling breathed coldness, as it were a mist upon the banks, was now the only sound where, before, there had been the ringdove and the birr of wings. So, once one thought of it, no other thing could hold the attention, and one was happier before this purling stream had stolen upon the ears.

But the ghost upon the stepping stones crosses from bank to bank, walking upon the water. It wets her bare ankles and splashes to her knees. The stones are far apart and she has to go slowly, holding herself taut for every spring while she looks for a foothold upon the slippery rocks. Their waterworn roundness and the sharp edges of them underneath the weed makes her bend down low to the stream so that the reflection of her face and hair are seen in the water. But this ghost of a ghost is substantiated by her laughing mouth and the tumbling of her locks across her eyes, shaken back again at every recovery of posture. Also, her strong bare legs, in which the muscles can be seen, are a denial of ghostliness. If it were a ghost, who would want to see the rest of her legs, higher than the knees? Yet that is the delight of her leaping from rock to rock; though this materialism, those feet of clay, are contradicted by the goddess-like beauty of her head and body. This much can be seen while she crosses the sunlight out of the shadow of the leaves. And, as if to make it memorable, and for a stay of time, an unreal greenness lights the new-leaved trees. Nowhere else in the world does such a light cling to the branches. It is perpetual sunset upon a shower of rain. At the same moment that mid stream is a channel of light, a sudden chill, like a hush or a breath, descends upon the stony banks, and the scene turns in

THE GHOST UPON THE STEPPING STONES  
imagination into a broad but shallow river flowing under the  
grey stone walls of a castle.

Meanwhile, this ghostly transition from bank to bank is near to accomplishment. She has reached the climacteric of the waters in a leap that is the limit of her stretch, and now the wind and the water play above her knees, uncovering what was hidden before. That ravishment of lines is complement to her bare legs from knee to ankle, while her laughing face lifts this freedom of limbs into the thrill of adventure in the wild waters. The spray is on her hands and hair; and she has quickly to save herself by another spring, or turn and fall and make back to the bank. All the time, danger is only little and pleasant, no higher than the knee, only a playing with danger and no worse than the first trembling of the heart. And yet, for our purposes, this crossing of the river is her translation from one world into another. It could not be a more utter change if it was a matter of death and not another kind of life. Like everything else that is beautiful, this moment has nothing but sadness to every side and all around it. But the sound of the waters is incessant and does not allow of any other emotion than pleasure in that transient ghost.

We have our last sight of her in the shadow, only an instant after the golden vision of her climacteric; and a moment later she is climbing or scrambling on hands and knees upon the stones. Barefoot, and with feet of clay, she has to bend down, abjectly, and pick her way among the pebbles. With the dying of a breath she has turned from ghost to peasant girl; this goddess, for whose moment we prepared such an elaborate and painstaking background in her natal colours, comes down from the stepping stones and is a flatfoot goosegirl on the cobbles. Only a moment before, she held the light as if she dwelt in it, as if it was the emanation of her skin and body, rubbed into her and given forth again by her person. Now she has lost it, and it as though she had never possessed it.

So many things had gone to its perfection. That half-tamed figure under the damson bough is so be seen in retrospect as the

## THE GHOST UPON THE STEPPING STONES

creation of that environment of waters in a country which, by the fecklessness of the inhabitants, had been denied its potential and latent wealth, the riches of its bucolic kingdom. Not that it was altogether their fault. Its shapes and contours make of it a paradise that is unhappy. And so it must for ever remain, far away from the stream of life and with the sadness of all things that are a little remote from reality. There was never a merchant sail upon its seas and its fountains ran down their waters to a limitless ocean, whose extent was as an image or metaphor for eternity. It had no end, and since nothing came out of its distances it was no more imminent or measurable than the air above one's head.

This green country on the edge of the world, with nothing beyond it, had its pastoral life but little further developed than in an acquiescence to its pasture lands but no cultivation of the crops. It was all meadows and no cornfields. The stooks of corn never stood like a town of tents above the stubble. The hillside was never a honeycomb cut into and gone. There was only the rye patch or a square of oats: never a cornfield nor the threshing floor. It needed labour to nod the heads of corn. But ploughing and tilling were no part of their temperament. They preferred the meadows. Here, the rain showers did the work of man. To tend the flocks of geese or the herds of cattle was no more trouble than it was to watch the clouds. The riches of the country were its water meadows, in a land of milk and eggshell where a child could lie all day upon a hilltop listening to the cowbells and a hundred husbandmen could do no more among the vines. There were only cows to be milked and eggs to be taken. For the rest, it was as fruitful to stand under the damson bough.

The sloe and the elder flowered heedlessly and were robbed with no warning. No hand cared for them until they took the berries. Like pattering hailstones was the shaking of the hazel, violently shaken till every nut had fallen. Such was the country outside the walls, but even in this paradise, in this wilderness of

## THE BED OF WATERCRESS

little streams, the fruits were wasted or were picked in violence. There was no mercy for the damson bough.

And that sleeve of snow brings us to the river bank, for the demi-wildness of this pastoral valley is shown in the beds of watercress. It grew in green tresses on the water flats in shallow-dug trenches that were like dew pools or prehistoric earthworks. This little labour of digging went to it, and then it could be left. Its only necessity was for the fresh, living water to flow among its tresses dropping from pool to pool as from a brimming fountain, no more than that, but as the green stains of the fountain brim, the footsteps of water.

If this was allowed it, then the cress like a green weed choked the shallow pool in nereid tangles and clusters of green curls. It could be lifted in handfuls; and the green stalks of it snapped as though they were stems of glass. Like flowers of another element, green flowers of water, the cress was crumpled and lifeless in the hand; while, in the water pool, its sister tresses joined their tentacles and filled the emptiness that it had left. It is in this that it differs from the terrestrial flowers that cannot reach out to each other upon the wind but must touch by patient growth. And in the same way that the grass of these meadows must carry the life principle of the fields, their green lushness and the softness of the showers to the herds that graze there, moving slowly as any cloud above the plain, so the whole soul of this view and the entity of this paradise of little streams is expressed in the taste of the watercress. It has not only the sweet, clear river-water, but we can fancy, also, its dalliance in the dew pools, by full moon or midday, the purity of the high hills, and the salt lichen of the swamp. It is, indeed, the incarnation of the waters, their roundness of the raindrop and their edge of metal. If I want to think of that green land in its hidden heart, and to taste again the enchanted air, and feel the heartbeat at the ghost of it crossing upon the stepping stones, I can deduce all this from a bunch of watercress, releasing it into the memory from the nereid tangles of its dark green leaves. No more than that is

## A PLACE OF WAITING

necessary. It is the incantation of that paradise and of its saffron or tawny-skinned inhabitant.

But now, we must remove her from that world of simplicity to the contemporary scene. And if it is to be typical of our age we substitute the long corridors of a hotel for the dew ponds and the damson bough. In a sense, it is an inferno entered by a swing door.

This place of waiting is permeated by its own peculiar air, compounded of the muffling of every footstep by the thick pile carpet and the mercenary loudness of the band. The velvet carpet is, indeed, equivalent to the strewing of sand by which all unpleasant traces are obliterated in the arena. It is, also, being one of the few things in the hotel that are not entered directly upon the bill, an extravagance of conciliation on the part of the management. As time goes on, and their standard of comfort and luxury is raised, there is such a similarity in these interiors that their total amounts to an international, or universal purgatory, a place of waiting in which everyone is reduced to the same level even if their payments are upon a different scale. The fact that you are not condemned to it, but enter of your own free will, does not in the least alter the truth of this, for it is implied that you commit your faults and are responsible. This purgatory only exists in order to entice you inside its doors. But, in order to appreciate it in contrast to the scenes that have gone before, we call for every light to burn, while we darken, as with November fog, the morning that is pushed in to us and pulled away again by the revolving door. But it will be admitted that for dramatic effect external summer is in more telling contradiction to this corridor of artificial light, and so we recreate the mood of the opening sentences of this book. It is, again, a morning when metal is too hot to touch, when the pavement is too hot to tread.

So, now, it is only a question of waiting. But this is precisely the agony or the purgatory of the place. It has no mercy of the

## A PLACE OF WAITING

electric lights, which have to burn all day as well as through the night. And in this artificial tropic the band never ceases for more than a moment and gives a false start, in turn, to every sentiment that music can inspire. It is a dwarfing or belittling of the soul, and then, perhaps, an instant later, an incitement to its most exaggerated ends of expression. Also, the music can impute to itself things that it does not really possess. Therefore, so far as the spirit is concerned, these moments of waiting are like the whirlwinds of Hell, ceaselessly blowing, but dwarfed from their primal force into no more than an agony of suspense, a tossing to and fro upon uncertain winds. None of them are strong enough to bear one's weight. It is an agony of sinking.

But these pains of indecision are liable to be increased out of all proportion at any moment. The table of papers that no one ever reads and the multitude of chairs that belong to no one in particular, all these little details add their weight to this anguish of emptiness. And then the reality of it, made more genuine still by the fact that it has to be paid for in money, is broken by the firing of every ambition at no more encouragement than a mere phrase of music. The effect of this is as though one is lifted up by the shoulders. In the lands of sulphur, among the volcanoes, there are caves or corridors into the hills where a layer of nauseous air lies a foot or two above the floor. A dog would suffocate in it, and if you fell from weariness upon that floor you would meet with the same fate. Perhaps the raising of false hopes upon the wings of music can be no better symbolized than in the effects of such a lifting out of the slough of pestilence into the pure air. But the relapse comes back again after but a breath or two and the dread of sinking.

From this imagery of the nerves it can be guessed what is the purpose of this delay. It has, of course, a personal destination. But the marble and velvet that are its material accompaniment are so thin in veneer, or so calculated in amount, that their expensive meanness gives birth to many and various impressions. It would be easy, for instance, in place of these hybrid tunes to

## A PLACE OF WAITING

imagine the proper music for these stressings of the heart. But this is no place for expressions of simplicity. Once within this purgatory, one must, chameleonlike, take colour from its walls.

The only way to prevail in this environment would be by playing to its rules. It would be music of the palm-court or the forcing-house; and its tensions, indeed, correspond most nearly to the alternate languor and racing of the heartbeat. The air is drugged and perfumed in a *valse des fleurs*, as by the only musician who has felt this anguish and given it form. It is stage music: and its neurosis is nothing more complicated than stage fright. For this present anguish is no more than that. Its palliation lies in the violent acceptance of its rigours. But these intensify and become worse and worse as the moment approaches. And there are alternations when the whole horror disappears and it is merely a question of walking on and saying a few lines. But a moment later it has returned, and with the reappearance of this dreaded ghost the only comfort is in imagining the perfection of such music as that at which we have hinted. With the door left open to catch its strains from below, all along the corridors, one would like to lean out of window listening over the roofs of the town to the noises of a fair. For the enervation and luxury of this interior should find its counterpart in the cold outside. Tchaikowsky who, alone among musicians, understood the terrors and exaltations of the theatre, in the sense that he identified himself with its exaggeration of the emotions to the extent that he is for ever inseparable from its encounters and farewells, is the creator of the only atmosphere that can be transferred bodily from its original purpose and fitted to this parallel of nervous anticipation. This being so, we must search for its closest contingency in the contrast of his luxuriant texture, the magnolia or camellia of the conservatory, with the snow upon the roads and roofs, the black, trampled snow that falls in all the beauty of a transformation scene but lies like bloodless or anaemic mud. It is this that we

## LE LAC DES CYGNES

should be looking out upon from the window-sill while we listen to the intoxication of his rhythms.

We will delay for a moment and listen to *Le Lac des Cygnes*. This is born into ghostly permanence, at once, by the admonition of the instruments. It is a shuddering of the strings, a shuddering as if a sudden wind swept the chords. The atmosphere of the whole story is implicit in this first breath of being, and no magician's wand has ever created a world of enchantment more quickly than the lake and its mists as evoked in this music. But, even before its tremors are hushed, the orchestra launches into a romantic prelude of compelling poetry and conviction.

It is November, the month of the hunter's moon. The sunset has already begun in a corner of the sky so that there are mysterious lights upon the water, and the romantic length of the tune brings us into the very mist upon the banks. It is as heavy on the air as the smoke of a bonfire. It is dank and chill-laden, finding a counterpart in the long grass that has never dropped its frost all day and is ice cold to the touch. This is haunted ground: there is not a breath of wind in the reeds or ruffling the water. Of a sudden, with the birth of new music, Tchaikowsky introduces the victims of this hallucination. They are the prince of the fairy story and his friends; and it is no strain upon probability to imagine that the prince is hunting in the woods of Denmark, not far from Elsinore and the Sound. He is certainly of that family, predisposed to a haunted imagery.

Of all the persons who could ever have been chosen for this adventure the great Nijinsky was the most fitted. He was the very embodiment of the music, and was able to interpret its nostalgic landscape to a perfection that is unimaginable to those who never saw him. There was something unique and ineffable in his tread upon the boards; so that the world of poetry of which he was the master required no other instigation than the moment of his appearance. It sprang into being with his presence, and endured till the last breath of the music.



## LE LAC DES CYGNES

The prince and his companions have come to the edge of the lake in search of a flock of swans whom they disturbed from far off at their cloudy mirrors on the surface of the water, so that the swans broke the silence with the beat of their wings and flew away into the trees, drifting down through the leafless branches into the reeds. There, they are hidden. It is a sensation that is nearly indescribable in words to watch the search that is being made for these snowy figments of the mist. The dancers have to run into the shadows of the stage as if to the cadence of some line of romantic poetry, and the couplet brings them back again to the footlights so that the clash of this imaginary rhyme leaves them poised, once more, at the end of another miming of its meaning. In midst of them, and dressed in another colour for mark of his rank, Nijinsky seems in imagination to breathe the mist and to interpret this haunted moment through the medium of other senses than the ordinary. The stresses of this poignancy grow more and more intense in poetry: the moment of metamorphosis approaches, it thrills the senses and thrills the very skin—and the Swan Princesses come upon the stage, with a run of little steps as though alighting through the branches with a shut of wings.

The music has imbued them with wings and they are transformed to cygnets. The elaborate patterns of the dance can now spread themselves forth in earnest while the ballerinas move into their positions upon the field, though these have no more ultimate truth of fact than has a fixed point in space, all their certainty is of the music which is ever miraculously at their side to support them. The banality of some of the tunes is a reminder that the Swan Princesses are really cygnets, that the cygnets are really ballerinas, and that the ballerinas will soon be walking home; while the 'period' of its stresses, the time fixation of the waltz or of the pas de quatre, gives us the lighted streets along which they walk, the lighted windows, as of a chocolate shop into which they stare longingly while passing; and, all the time that this is in progress, the snow falling, the winter evening in

## LE LAC DES CYGNES

St. Petersburg, the deadening of every sound, and the gaslit air powdered with snowflakes all along the Italianate façades of the streets. In fact, the more banal of the tunes supply, by a sort of deliberate deficiency, the realism of detail without which this ballet would dwell for too long in the empyrean, would be too lyrical. And, if we pause for a while to appreciate the banalities, there are, as well, the great moments of the dance. These are of a proud virtuosity, of a peacocklike spreading of the plumes. The great open airs, of which Tchaikowsky is undisputed master, are vehicles of display for the greatest riches of the classical dance. Adolphe Adam and Delibes, the ancestors of these tunes, are scarcely to be recognized in them, so much have their conventions been overshadowed by this prodigal personality. An Italian breadth has been added to them, and the clarity and beauty of Bellini, or at least the qualities in Bellini that gave him his vocal line are here transferred from the art of singing into that of dancing. It is true that Tchaikowsky was given in minute detail, by Marius Petipa the choreographer, the form that his figures were to take, but his extraordinary talent for music of the dance enabled him to fulfil these conditions without any apparent effort. He appears as absolute dictator and carries the dancers with him.

Music of this character has never been written before, and it will never be written again. It is both the dance, itself, clothed in its flesh, and, also, the skeleton of the dance; so that if we had to invent a simile for its effects we might compare it to a scaffolding, complicated with many floors, the true purpose and import of which are only visible when the scaffolding is crowded with moving figures. It is only when workmen are busy on every floor and in all the openings that the merely transitional truth of the scaffolding itself, without its accompaniment of figures, becomes impressed upon the mind. So it is with *Le Lac des Cygnes*; the stresses and volutes of the open melodies have, each, their individual import: they dictate the dance. These sensations, and many more, are implicit in this music. And, per-

## LE LAC DES CYGNES

haps, the peculiar exclusion and privacy of its conditions are nowhere more apparent than in the most tremendous of its pyrotechnics. These are set, in seeming contradiction, to the surface simplicity of the open airs. The *grande adagio* is the sublimation of a sight only to be seen in the glades of a wood; and by a happy chance the title of this ballet by its present of suppositious plumes gives credence and probability to one of the most extreme of stage exaggerations. For the *grande adagio* is a ceremonial dance of the sort that is described by naturalists in books of travel. Another instance of this, and one in which both composer and choreographer seem to have set out with this deliberate intention, is the famous *pas de deux* from *La Belle au Bois dormant*. It is known as *l'Oiseau bleu*, and the fluttering and preening of its steps is of an identical character to the *grande adagio*, and is only less proud and languorous as befits the difference in name.

But, indeed, all the music for this second act of *Le Lac des Cygnes*, from the very start of the prelude, is of exceptional, transcendental nature, and it even draws profit, as we have shown, from its own occasional banalities. This actual *adagio* is nearly incredible in the subtlety of its indications to the dancers. The pathos and loveliness of its artificiality are given particular emphasis when the male dancer leads the ballerina away from the intricacies of the dance and the music lets them wander, linked in each other's arms, to the back of the stage. Their short and deliberate steps, as they walk away, draw attention to the momentary rest that they need, and, by contrast, this walk of theirs heightens the technique of the dance while it points and accentuates the humanity of the dancers. This is their breathing space before the renewed ardours of the attack; and they return to it from the advantage of a new position with the whole extent of the stage as their field, all the way from the mists and reeds of the lake up to the golden plain of the footlights. They are enlarged in scale the more nearly they approach to the audience; so that from the back, where they are no taller

## LE LAC DES CYGNES

than the other members of the *corps de ballet*, they advance by a pattern of figures into the heroic lights and their height increases with every turn of the dance.

We know enough of Tchaikowsky to understand that his love for the stage was at the background of all his imagination. It was the stimulus behind his febrile energies, and every aspect of his music must be interpreted in the light of this knowledge. When composing *Le Lac des Cygnes* he can never, that is to say, have wanted to give the story probability; its interest for him, on the contrary, lay entirely in the fact that it gave him such an opportunity for his clichés. These tricks of manner, all through his music, are in reality the turns and conventions of dancing; the sentiment is ever that of a stage farewell; the lovers are not parting from each other, but they are miming the impossibility that such a moment of poetry should ever take place in real life. If it is a farewell, at all, it is a parting from the audience; it is a play upon the harshness of fate that will never allow this barrier to be broken down, and it is almost equivalent to an individual apology given to every member of the audience. If a cruel fate keeps the painted scenes of the theatre as an ideal world, unattainable, impossible of access, we are left also with the pathos of these princes and Swan Princesses who find their only luxury on the stage, who live in poverty away from the painted scene.

The Swan Princess and her lover are nearing the end of the *adagio*. She is pleading with him, and he imprisons her arms so that she cannot implore him any longer, while they both perpetuate the last moments of their love on the intoxication of the music, swaying to and fro to its strains. She is in his arms, with her head against his shoulder, and for a moment they do not move except with this swaying to the rhythm. He holds her, and she appears to shut her eyes, while she is so light upon the ground, held fast in his embrace, and resting on no more than the point of one foot, that this is most obviously the climax of the dance, just before its apotheosis.

But, in that moment, the air returns into her plumes; the mu-

## SCHERZO OF TCHAIKOWSKY

sic alters and is menacing, and she fades from him into the reeds, while the dark figure of the magician shadows the lake shore. The prince tries to follow her, but falls to the ground in a swoon at the sight of that ghostly shape, and his companions throw up their arms in terror and run from the haunted stage.

Such should be the music of this transcendental moment. It should be possible to lean out from the window-sill, with that music behind one's ears coming through the open door along the corridor, while, below, the noises of a fair come up out of the snow to mingle with this imprisoned luxury and apprehension. The steam organ pants and wheezes, there are snatches of street songs, and from afar come the sounds of a military band. But these things have no connexion with actuality: they are intangible forms, wild strange fancies.<sup>1</sup> The military band, in particular, can only be of ghostly significance; except that in the unreality of a dream, where every tie of time and place is broken, there can be no improbability. The snarl of trumpets, the rolling of drums are marching in the mean streets, upon the trampled snow. It is, therefore, more the ghost of a soldier revisiting his home than the military spectre, evoked as such. In any case, it is no more than the skeleton of a band, the soldier and his friends serenading in the slums. And the sound of them is blown away by the same wind that brings the steam organ and the blaring of the fair. For all these things are unreal and intangible. They are no more than the confused images that pass through our minds as we fall asleep.<sup>1</sup>

But, just as they should be dying into oblivion, that band comes back again. In the streets that they are haunting they pass the open corner and come nearer and nearer, as if straight towards the window. And, of a sudden, the fair blares out loud; but so noisily that there can be no voices to break its strength. No one can be riding upon the wooden horses, and the fair ground must be empty. It must be midnight: but even before the lights

<sup>1</sup>Tchaikowsky, in a letter to his patroness, Madame von Meck.

## THE EMBODIMENT OF THE MOMENT

are put out this ghostly scherzo has hurried itself out of existence and there is no sound at all.

Instead, it is midday, lit by the lights of summer. On a morning when metal is too hot to touch, when the pavement is too hot to tread. But, in place of what we imagined, the heat runs cool as a river along the darkened corridors. For every control is at work upon it, of lowered shutters and electric fans. The heat is not stagnant but is kept in motion. And it is because of this that the wait of half an hour in the hall of an hotel has been crowded with so many images of antidote and entertainments of the imagination. But there is no time for more of such figments: the moment approaches.

It burns up, but is damped again with every person who comes into the room. Since it is so long overdue it has, already, its own existence and being. Like that moment of metamorphosis, it thrills the senses and thrills the very skin; and sure enough, without any other warning, it comes upon the scene with a run of little steps, as though alighting through the branches. There is even something arbitrary in its chosen moment; as though no combination of numbers would have arrived at the proper solution as to its time of appearance. It works upon a different tempo, another time signature, so that until the peculiarities of its mood are known it is impossible to guess the sequence in which it is moving. Its rhythm does not coincide with any of the noises or happenings upon which it is about to impinge, so that its independent life is quite outside the movements, as from table to table, of the other personalities of the place. They pursue the curves of their own patterns which are in relation to the spacing of each other; and even, if one had the curiosity to compare the ticking of the two or more clocks in the room, themselves an extravagance of conciliation on the part of the management comparable to the thick pile carpet along the floor of the corridor, they compose into the universal harmony in which the approach and separation of those two hearts, as it were, of time,

## THE EMBODIMENT OF THE MOMENT

are the proof that there is human feeling even in inanimate objects and among the abstractions of the elements.

But this moment of entrance is arbitrary and unpremeditated, like the irruption of something from out of another solar system. And its contact sets up a new control so that the ancient play of rhythms, now that it is no longer necessary as a pastime and distraction, fades altogether out of notice. Neither is there any time for present introspection: nothing but this immediate reality can hold the attention.

But it unfolds itself so quickly in all its possibilities that these have become alive just as if words were given life at the lips. And, indeed, this is no less than the truth; for the mere conversation during luncheon or dinner, granted these conditions of excitement, summons into being every travesty ever worn by the ghost inhabiting this affection. I call her ghost, since force of feeling makes her every appearance credible and has imputed to her many things that she may only possess in the eyes of her beholder. There is not a human being who is not haunted by his or her own spectres of this kind, illusions that they may share with others but that in no single instance can be the same. They must always be different; so that it is, perhaps, only by allowing the fullest and widest expression to these feelings that their universal truth can be applied. This must be our excuse for the elaborate background to this figure, for it is essential that it should be seen in all the apprehension of its coming, and this can only be achieved in its proper setting, whether that be down the darkening symbol of the gallery of yews, or in the corridor of a hotel which is the metaphorical statement of her transference out of the past into the hot and vivid present.

Now that the hour of sophistication has arrived this metamorphosis has accomplished itself without a trace of its origin. Its external shell is to the pattern of all the others, but this is inhabited by a being who has taken the curves and exaggerations of contemporary time into an instinctive advantage. Indeed, once this is seen, she can no longer be separated from the fore-

## THE EMBODIMENT OF THE MOMENT

ground with which she has so closely identified her shadow. To talk with her, therefore, is to have the ghost of the moment within touch of the fingers. This is a blood feeling: as it would be to tread upon a living body, or have the life of some animal in the power of one's hand to take away or spare. The moment is made incarnate in her person, so that this mere pleasing of the eyes is joined with such a sensation as might be imagined at finding, let us say, a bowl of wine in a rockhewn tomb, drinking it, for it is miraculously preserved, and discovering in that moment the Attic landscape shining in its lights, the vines upon the hillside, a strength of poetry as insistent on the air as the scent of a bonfire, and, higher up, the hoofmarks of the centaur in the chestnut wood. In fact, the whole of an antique autumn morning in a bowl of wine.

Yet, once that is tasted it has gone, never to come back again, whereas this embodiment is in the perpetual flower of its youth, if, that is to say, an eternity can last for no more than four or five years. The morning is long enough: it is all eternity, and is gone in a moment. But this is the perpetual contradiction in everything that has to do with this emotion of the senses. It lifts and lets fall again the shutters of time to the extent that there is no consistent measure of its length. Even a little time is time to burn: until that has gone up in the flames and is no more.

There is something in this art of instinctive adaptation that is akin to the most perfect form of acting. This feminine genius for finding the utmost expression of the present, when it is in their power to alter entirely even the form of that by the morrow, can only be recorded, like memories of the theatre, in a mosaic of attitude and gesture. But that placid surface would be cracked and scored as if it had passed through war and fire; instead, we follow our own method, in which, perhaps, there will be seen, as it were, the blue veins under the skin. For the exterior of the play is purposeful deception: it is a screen behind which the contemporary tricks of manner are shed off and divested down to the eternal truths.



## THE EMBODIMENT OF THE MOMENT

In this we are returning nearer and nearer to the travesties of the masqued ball; as if, already, we can hear the music along the empty passages. But, for the sake of our climax, we will linger for a little while in the natural heat of this summer afternoon. It is to-day: and the light is at the solstice. To-day, which can never be again. It is as if the present is animal, for these are conditions that apply only to things that are human or animal, and not to objects of wood or stone. It is dying under our hands even as we speak, and it represents that amount of death in ourselves, for if we knew the future we should see ourselves come perceptibly nearer along this element of which we are so prodigal. Of time's three divisions, this is the one which is alive and of which we feel the heart beat. Sometimes the strength of those other dimensions has been discovered and distantly communicated; but this has the pulse of the blood in its living flesh.

We see it in a raised hand, when the lemon fingers lift slowly to the hair, lie close to the curls of that and lift them, one by one, behind the ears. The saffron locks are so finely combed that they look as if washed or blown through with fine sand. It is a lion-movement, like a lioness. This sultry parallel is maintained in her skin of lemon rind, only it is more burnt and tawny. But the heart or life blood of this languid being is a moment later, when she puts the red upon her lips. Their full curves take and tantalize the colour, so that the redness of her mouth is the venality or mark of surrender, the exposed heart as it were, of this husk-hidden person. Her red lips are the talisman and the mark of her disdain. They are, also, her acknowledgement that she is human and has a heart to be killed. This gesture of putting more red upon her lips is equivalent to the putting of added difficulties in the way of her lovers. It is the exaggeration of their pains and the brightening of her armour; and, when it is thus regarded, the act takes on a symbolical importance so that if it was a case of painting her portrait this would be the gesture most characteristic of her personality.

The possession of that extraordinary colour fires the imagina-

## PORTRAIT

tion with many curious pictures of her prime. No skin of the coral islands or of Tahiti can ever have taken the sun upon it to such glorious effect. It is ripe nectarine, warm upon the wall, with bruises of the nectarine flesh where there are shadows. Or the skin is warm and smoky, as if there were smoke or fire of sulphur under the surface. Odaliskues of coffee or of jasmine, born in those hues and paling behind the lattice, can never have had that warmth or attained to this colour. Neither, in any age but our own, can Northern skin have been burnt into this tawny tone, for every other generation has hidden from the sun. It is only now that this mirror of the tropics has been achieved and the bodies of the coral shore matched with amber. The adding to this of golden hair gives to those other qualities all the improbability of a legend, for its possession in their eyes would have the likelihood of a nereid coming up out of the sea. Her skin, by their own, would mark the pallor of the foam and her golden locks the lights upon the water.

But, in other respects, this novice is a parallel to their canon of savage beauty. Her long back might be the body, shaped and trimmed, of a war canoe. The bows of this swell but slightly for her breasts as they ride upon the water. Her limbs call for nudity and are only coarsened when they are clothed. It might, also, be said for the completion of this parallel that her flesh has the firmness of those sandy shores. It is tight to the touch like those wet sands at the margin of the sea that dry and harden to the tread. These move at a touch and have the warmth of the living animal in their dark gold grains. This is, in fact, the only simile for her burnt and tropical body which has retained something of the warmth in which it was dyed in the ripe nectarine of its surface. But every metaphor for its separate beauties is coordinated into the whole living effect, which is more animal than human owing to her burnt colour and barbaric shape, while the very perfection of this redeems itself again into humanity because anything of such beauty must have a soul.

However that may be, and without the inclination, at pre-

## THE CORAL ATOLL

sent, to discover its truth or not, there is no doubt that the proper background for this figure, now that we have divested it down to the ultimate truths of its nudity, is the land-locked harbour or sweet waters of the atoll. Beyond, the great breakers can roll against the coral pier, like far-off summer thunder in the long afternoon. Nothing exterior can reach to the peace of this inner lagoon, not even a sight of white sails if the ghost of a galleon came past upon the Trades. All the external world must be invisible and non-existent in this classic calm. But the sensation of the background is given in every movement of this statue who is its inhabitant. She lies like a goddess on the shore or is shown in greater beauty in the shadowless water. Her only ornament is a chain of flowers of the clianthus, the red flower worn by the Maori women in a wreath among their hair<sup>1</sup>; for its violent redness matches her red mouth and is redder still than upon their sable skins. The hard, bright beak of the flower, like a parrot's bill or a lobster's claw, is more effectual ornament to her colour than the creamy petals of magnolia or camellia which are designed for soft, white skins. The clianthus, a pod or a husk more than a flower, is the better talisman against that hard firmness or savage heat. It does not spoil or bruise among its petals, and will last all day in and out of the waters of the pool. It hangs like a girdle of red shells upon the waist, and in red wristlets for the hands or feet.

Then, of a sudden, like the imminence of the snow mountains out of the distance, this figure is realized in stature upon the air. One moment she is sitting on the firm sands, the lines of her legs and back rising in daring beauty from that hard shelf. It is the horizon or pedestal to her shape of beauty, or it is the line below a signature in writing. She is sitting with straight back and legs drawn up, so that her whole contour is described in the raising of her knees, the tightening of the curves where her thighs rest upon the sand and the return of those curves up the long simplicity of her back into the neck and shoulders, along

<sup>1</sup> G. F. Angas, *Sketches of New Zealand*; 1847? pl. 3?

## THE CORAL ATOLL

the bent arms to the knees again. The red claws of the clianthus worn in a single string of blossoms at her waist are the impressions of something hard and hot into the tawny flesh of her hips, and it is as if these indentations were dyed with red or with a simulacrum of red blood, or of the red of her lips and nails. There is nothing more than this belt of flowers upon her. But the tangible fairness of her fronds of hair, newly curled and combed, have such glitter and attraction that they entangle the eyes for ever and ever among her electric locks, which look as if they would hiss and glitter with sparks, when touched, and, in realism, are curled filaments or springs, dusted, as if with a frost of gold, and smelling like the breath of flowers. The disarranging of her hair is, indeed, one of the hazards of any contact with this figure, until the first touching of it shows how easily such ravages are repaired and the wind or water obliterated in any traces of their cool fingers playing in her hair. Nevertheless, its brightness serves as a kind of spectacular defence to the exposed and burnt ripeness of her limbs and body. But the apparent ease of her posture is protected by the rolled-up hedgehog hiding of her secrets; and the temptation is to lift up this light and incurved engine and let its own living breath uncoil itself in pleasure.

But this very transition now accomplishes itself magically upon the air. Her limbs like pistons stretch out to their length, and, in an instant, she has risen to the level of the eyes. This salamander who had lain sleeping in the ashes of the fire now walks and moves so that the belt of red clianthus trembles with her steps. The red flowers shake and dangle upon her thighs and their dalliance draws the eyes to her perfect proportions, the neck tallying to the calf of leg, her waist to the two calves joined together, with no mark or blemish and nothing hidden but the pressings of that red girdle, masked by its flowers. The irritation of that lovely form proceeds out of the question and answer of its units. These are posed in each movement and every angle of her figure, at eye level and turning in the round. It is

## THE CORAL ATOLL

the provocation of just proportion, rising out of the lengths and curves of the limbs. Their rhythm, like poetry, has female and male rhymings in its shape, so that surrender and satisfaction are expressed in the back and front contours of the legs, or in the two legs taken together in duality, just as much as in the reddened lips where the contrast of upper and lower and their opening or coming together make an image in miniature of the dual nature in every soul, the longing for love and the craving to direct it into destruction and pain. For predilection, this ornament of the atoll has no accents that are too strong in the stressings of her shape, but a gentle swelling to the apple stem, like an apple for each hand, and firmer fesses of her hips, jutting impertinently from the blood-red blossoms when the belt of flowers slips down to girdle them and thinning delightfully down into the articulations of her legs. Every stand of this idol upon the air is an audacity, for all of her body climbs into the sky and is outlined against the flutings of that hollow and foam-flecked shell. A white cloud like a spray or jet of cirrus, no more than that, and sailing alone across the immensity, passes slowly and it is as if it touched her molten and living flesh, dwelling upon that copper skin and moving from shoulder to breast in long-drawn breath, before it leaves her naked as it found her. The tones of her voice, speaking in intelligible words, and the soft padding of her bare feet upon the sand, are the humanity and the humbling of this divinity in mortal form. This is her venality, it is in sign that she has a heart or soul to be killed: like all her race, it is, even, her only purpose, and her defences of beauty are so many fortifications inviting attack.

Now that she has risen from the ground and walks upon the shore, reality and solidity are given to her figure as if she was a shape built into the colours of the sea and sky. No reclining form can have the realism of one that is standing upright and in the full exercise of its machinery of motion, for it is this posture that raises us above the animal and that draws pathos to itself when any creature has learned to walk upon two legs in order to

## THE CORAL ATOLL

beg its bread. This girl of twenty, or just over, is twice the age of any animal, dog, or cat, or horse, that can entreat with its front paws, or whinny for its food. That thought gives freedom and experience to her liberty, but this spirituality declines again into animal terms at the blue waters of the atoll and the bronzing of her body. And this turn of reflection thickens her limbs so that her tread is heavier and softer upon the sands. At the same time it surrenders her to the earthly power of her possessor and limits to that extent the purposes of her self-display. The humiliation that she is inviting upon herself, like a perfunctory answer to the most involved and elaborate questioning, this is now apparent in her earthbound limbs though it is redeemed into beauty by the interrogation or the proffered arrogance in their shape. Impertinence is expressed in their curves; and perhaps the response to this preluding is the more thrilling just at this moment when the one soul has come down for degradation, having broken with the play of mirrors and no longer, Narcissus-like, studying her reflection but intent on the violence of a foreign war into the most secret citadels of her pride, while the other soul, having suffered for so long, thirsts to punish that provocation.

This animal of bronze now turns from the atoll and leaping on to a high rock of coral, that is like a pedestal, just for the breath of a moment stands with both legs together looking down for her foothold. The tension of her limbs is as if she had been taken up and thrown. All their direction is downward, like the edge of a sword, to her feet. The width of the shining blade is at her waist, and it tapers downwards from the hilt, thinning decisively and watermarked in a straight line which is the strength between its edges. The foreshortening of her body, seen from below, makes that no more than the pommel or handle to this sword of bronze, shaped to the hands for comfort in holding, while her two arms, stretched high above her head, are a guard for this grasping and give greater force to the violence of the coming battle. The whole effect is like the brandishing of a

## THE CORAL ATOLL

weapon before the eyes. It is presented to view in order to inspire the greatest effect in the beholder. His stimulus in attack must be the appreciation of this open adversary who conceals nothing of her defences. The whole weight and poise of the moment dwell at her hips, upon which the sunlight strikes a golden note while it shines like parhelions or mocksons from the metal of her knees and shoulders. Those joints of copper are stretched out to the highest tension of their play; and it is an exaltation in their strain which nothing but conquest can relax. But this must be delayed for a livelong moment till the failing of her breath and until her very foothold upon the coral falls like the falling of her pose. And when this comes it is in a breaking into life, as though with the striking of a wand, as if a wand touched her and she leaped with the sting of it. She is stung out of her arrogance into a humbling of her pride. It is with punishment begun that she comes down from the coral, smarting from the wand and fearing it will strike again. This is the pantomime; and it is portrayed in the provocation of her unlocked limbs. It is the spreading of the petals, for they curve back and outwards from the calyx, opening in shock, yet needing force for their purpose. It is to tempt the gale and tempt the touch of hands. To that end they curve and bend themselves, drawing down violence upon their fallen defences. But this proffered helplessness is inhabited by fire. It stings like a nettle or is prickly with thorns. And it is to draw the pain that her molten attitudes have broken to sweet bendings and to the offering of new surfaces running molten from that metal. The fire is hardly below the skin. It lies no deeper than the bronzing of the nectarine, coming from the core and the living heart. For the last glitter of this moment the tension tightens up and leaps again, belittling its own scale into childlike stature, to immature roundness, as if in this last minute it made appeal for mercy. It contracts in pain, not shrinking but hardening, toughened in its own inner fire. This is its youth, burning for another fire, and flaunting all its edges that will catch. It is an intolerable and aching pain, no longer a suffering or a

## THE CORAL ATOLL

supplication, no cry for mercy, but for instant death, long drawn in dying only as the wound is mortal. Death, or the death of that, is the only cure.

This is the philosophy of those changing moods. But the leap down of that momentary statue from its pedestal is accomplished no more slowly than the descent of any other living body from vertical into horizontal. Yet, in intention, it falls into a pit of fire and is impaled upon the spearheads. Deliberately, it courts disaster. The slaughter of this soul must be prolonged and ruthless to annihilation, through faint after faint until the final bloodshed. It takes every stage of creation by the sword, inhabits it and passes by: from soulless, limbless, eyeless to the eyes of reason, as if, in this statue, from the feet up to the lips, where the soul speaks and reason trembles for its words. For the fire, or echo, to that molten form burns steadily into the calyx heart, dwelling in that citadel like an army in a fallen fortress, entered in slaughter and sleeping in the ruins. Thus are the moods of the long morning interpreted into action. The hour of the clibanthus draws to the deserved end of its proffering and interrogations, though that chain of red blossoms has long ago withered and died.

Nevertheless, at another hour, a new chain of that scarlet flower swings from the waist, at the width of her body. It might have been gathered by the first to wake into a new world, in the dew-freshened dawn, for her alert movements belie the long shadows of the atoll. The belt has too few blossoms, and they slip and strain, shaking their scarlet beaks upon her copper skin, as they work down from the waist to the wider hips. It is the body's circumference, the tropic of this lovely statue. The red-tipped beaks bite and dangle there. This is her descent into the land-locked water for it is cool enough to bathe.

Her way leads from rock to rock, leaping on the coral, but the water is no distance away for no more than a coral rampart divides the sweet waters from the outer ocean. It is a true atoll or coral isle; not greater in extent than the ring of trees seen



## THE CORAL ATOLL

low upon the hillside in that land of unreal green. This had been through a loophole window in the tumbled castle; and that wood it will be remembered was full of spring flowers, though superstition said that none dared pick them for the plucking of their stalks brought death. This island is no bigger than that ring of trees: but here is no shade of death, nor shadow of any kind but the passing of the clouds. Sleep is done with and the siesta'd lull. Instead of that, a new world opens at the water's edge.

It is born, ankle deep, as if treading in the flowers. A fervency of colour for which there is no parallel reigns along the water. When it is lifted it falls in drops of gold. It has fire on its surface and ice within its depths, even to the first step and to the fusion of the flowers, for the melting of those million heads to the life and moment of this metaphor makes the colour of the atoll. It is blue to the petals, to the flower of the blue water, and under that is more clear than glass, dead still and magnifying. The birth of this is at ankle depth and breaks the virgin water. She springs up out of it into the unencumbered air, hidden as to her feet of clay, and inhabiting air and water as though they were the elements to which she was born. Her feet are still upon the earth, but treading difficultly and making for the depths. But the passage of this living statue into the deep water is no evening vision but the dawn of its own time.

For, first, only the feet are hidden. All the rest of her body shows in fine machinery, rippling its muscles. The firm legs carry the torso, while the muscle plays in them plumping their curves into ripeness. They are the legs of a dancer, trained and developed. The line of these is drawn for their own element, when they move upon their toes. That is their beauty; and this weight of water, or its impeding, needs the same action. The springs of this are in their lovely motion, long drawn and lightly moving, while they tread deeper into the water. Her copper limbs are shewn in their entirety, from the ankle up. In tension they are like bows bent and curved for archery, as

## THE CORAL ATOLL

graceful as that, but they are taut as whipcord under the animal warmth of the skin, and their burnt colour is their humanity.

In another breath she is hidden in the water halfway to her thighs, like a statue broken at its point of beauty. But this mutilation only enhances the loveliness of what is left for her limbs are broken at their consummation, in the flower of their curving. The snapping of those stalks is as though a hand plucked them, as though it took the petal head and left the stem. But, suddenly, with water to her breasts, the atoll drops into a bottomless abyss, falling out of creation to a farther world, and launching her lithe figure to the mercy of its transparent depths.

It is an animal occasion; and, in an instant, gleaming even under the water, she is swimming with long thin strokes, throwing herself from side to side, her head resting on first one and then the other outstretched arm. Her cheek lies upon the softness of her arm as if she would sleep there, resting after it has hurled her forward; while her body, stretched out to its utmost length of limb, feels the passing of the cool waters, cooler because they are streaked with fire, down and along her back. They melt like snow below the warmth of her body and are cut to foam by her flanks and by her closed legs, tight together for speed, to the cleaving feet. This is one stroke, one mime of slumber; and, offering her other side, she turns away her head, and lifting her arm high out of the water leaps forward upon it, while her strong legs open in effort and strike together again, and she pillows her cheek once more upon the softness of her arm as if asleep after the strength and speed.

But in another stroke or two languor and inertia ride upon the waters. This figure glides with dying volition until her strength is spent. As a dream she ebbs to her bitter end of waking, when her long-drawn limbs slacken their tension into floating ease. She must tread water in order not to die down to the depths; and it is a release or incantation from animal into human, for that play of splashing and the sound of her words made clearer by the water bring her back into humanity.

## THE CORAL ATOLL

It is true that we have now travelled an incalculable distance in time from our first encounter with this figure by the damson bough or upon the stepping stones. That was long ago; though, as we shall soon know, the masqued ball is still in perpetual session, and the incidents in this chapter are no more than the pauses in that intermittent music. It may be thought of as the mirror to life, in which everyone is continually seeking his image. Much more than this, he is watching the reflections of the other masks; but when the moment of unmasking comes, when the lips and eyes that have never been hidden shine back into recognition, then the contingent truth, as of the complete reflection of his own self, not the mere answer from the glass, stands revealed and other realities will be shewn as well as the characters of the dancers. Those images, in fact, are intervisible, they are seen through one another; but that time is not yet, though, already, the breath of it begins to tarnish the mirrors.

Meanwhile, it is not to be denied that, even so far as we have arrived, the transitions of this emotional or spiritual state have been investigated by a method which is impossible in any other medium. Even the simple problem of an externally cold character being treated, according to its appearance, in the impersonal terms of a statue and the slow thawing of that metal—for its substance is metal and not marble—into life and feeling, even this simple theme would be impracticable by any other means. Neither cinema battery nor painter's brush could follow the rapid migrations of image; neither could they describe the repose of this lovely form by the shadowless water, nor her climbing to her feet and the elevation of this naked figure into the air. Neither the reduction of movement into a photographic record nor the fixing into permanency of an isolated moment could achieve this harmony of interpretation. Nor is it to be doubted that for the lover of hard surfaces the cold exterior of this husk or shell, displayed in its natural or burnt colours, is a subject of predilection and that he will have imputed to it qualities that might not be visible to the eyes of mechanical or hired wit-

## MAORI

nesses. But it is for this very reason that his narrative is more to be trusted than the evidence of unbiased eyes. For the truth, and nothing but the truth, has never made a work of art.

And, while these very words are said, the tropic background builds itself again. It is, first of all, to the creation of shadows for the shadeless atoll. The Maori, or the Melanesian image, first made manifest in the chosen clianthus, weaves or plaits itself into an intricacy that is the proof of its simple beginnings. It is the craft of the canoe builder. The sculpting of those bows to breast the surf was their conquest of Nature, for from island to island they had come in their canoes, across the archipelago, to the great isles of north and south. Here, they dwelt as warriors of an heroic age, lost in another world. Not only were they too distant to have any communication with other men, left in solitude to their own discoveries in culture, but the two islands by their very stringencies forced the direction of this development. Birds and flowers there were in multitude; but no fourfooted animal except the race of dogs whom they had carried hither in their canoes. This impossibility of meat made them into avowed cannibals, but their high ideals of courage and chivalry changed these feasts from an orgy into something of a sacrament. They were strange in all things, as is to be expected of every isolated community, and more especially in lands of this great extent where peculiarities can expand and grow. And the late date of their discovery by the white man has precluded them from any mention in the arts, so that if they pertain, in a sense, to the fabulous Indies they are far distant from that historical concept both in space and time. Nevertheless, this is their provenance; and it is these considerations, together with some definite physical resemblance in the subject, that have decided our choice to build a temporary paradise upon their shores. It had its origin in a diadem of scarlet flowers, and the same source will provide many more pictures of their uncontaminated pride.

This farthest and latest of the Indies, the Antipodes, is true to its fame of feathers. Chieftains of ancient blood wear mantles of

## MORE BIRD MEN

the particular plumes that are their prerogative. The loose effect of these immensely increases the width of the shoulders, so that their aquiline features, tattooed faces and tattooed bodies seen where the robe hangs open, carry them into the semblance of bird men. Those cloaks of feathers are like wing sheaths, with the wings folded back and shut, ready to open. The feet of these figures would have to be talons, and this necessary illusion is sustained in the lines and circles of their tattoo marks. That other race of bird men, the Red Indians of the North American prairie, never attained to this toga'd and senatorial calm, in part because their feather regalia was of plumes strung wide apart and fluttering, and partly for the reason that the epitome of their pride was the Redskin riding his horse. But his steed was a light, wild horse, in no way resembling the Gothic horse, the *destrier* or *percheron* for our plated armour; while the wing feathers of the eagle made a line of flags or kites tied to his back and never a box of wings nor the spread and soaring splendour. Besides, the prairie is to be compared in nothing with this coral shore. Neither are the maple woods, not even in autumn in their shrouds of fire, to the orchid and epiphyte forest below the hills of snow. For their forest of spruce or larch is a monotony unlit by flowers. The Redskin may trail in Indian file, hour after hour and never speaking, while the maple woods like the dying dolphin faint in their million flukes and expire in flame, but it is only a background, a thin sensation to his fierceness, never a landscape. For, here, the Maori warriors have a static calmness against their setting which is like the ghosts of great men, the shades of the *Iliad*. The unruffled plumes exaggerate their stature and in their right hands they hold sceptres of jade, the symbols of their kingly power.

In their feather mantles a difference of structure is to be noted, for the plumes of these Antipodean birds for all their bright colours resemble long, straight hairs more than wing plumes, and the straight combing of the long feather strands down all the length of the feather mantle to the feet makes the height of

## FEATHER MANTLES

the wearer more gigantic still. There is never a green, nor a blue among these cloaks. Their astonishing variety in colour and pattern is always red, or black, or yellow. And it is not always of feathers that they are made. Almost the only other material available to them was dog's hair. This was woven into a stiff felt and dyed in tremendous blacks and yellows with the juices of herbs or tree barks. It was ornamented by knots or tufts dyed in red; or, on occasion, the whole mantle was of white, a ribbed and combed white, like a cloak of straw bleached into the pallor of snow. But, in general, they were of black or yellow, trembling in tier after tier down to the ground like a crinoline, or as if starched and stiffening to the feet. The whole robe shook and trembled as they walked, with a rattling like the wind in cars of corn.

It may be imagined with what majesty these figures moved, sceptre in hand.

The gravity of these sceptred shades was enhanced by the laughing and volatile character of their women. It was the women who made these elaborate robes or mats; and while only the highest chiefs by the exertions of their whole tribe could obtain plumes enough for a feather mantle the common dress of the nobles was woven by the women from the fibres of the native flax. The most valuable of these robes was the *Kaitaka*, wrought out of a species of *Phormium* cultivated especially for the purpose, the fibres of which almost attained to silk in their softness, and we are told that a period of two years was often devoted to their manufacture. Both winter and summer robes were composed of flax; the winter robes, being made of the dried leaves, were warm and impervious to the rain and gave the wearer, when sitting down, the appearance of a thatched haystack. The black-string mat, called *Koroai*, was a black dress thickly ornamented with black strings, or filaments, about a foot long, which hung down gracefully over the folds of the drapery. Another kind was adorned with tufts or bosses of coloured wool, and had black strings here and there at intervals,

## WAR CLOAKS

or scarlet feathers. Often the winter cloaks were thickly covered with strips of flax leaves, rolled up into tubes, and dyed black at alternate intervals, resembling the quills of a porcupine; it was these that dangled and produced a loud rustling noise as they jostled together at every movement of the wearer.

The *topuni* or war cloak, consisted of a large flax mat into which was fastened at every thread a lock of dog's hair dyed in different colours, giving the exact appearance of a beautiful fur. The patterns were often of pure white, or of black and white hair arranged in narrow stripes. These war mats had a shaggy collar, composed of strips of fur about six inches long falling over the shoulders. We have to think of the heads of these warriors as adorned with feathers, or with the blossoms of the clematis, the crimson metrosideros, and the green hoyia. Amongst the feathers employed for this purpose those of the tail of the Neomorpha were of black, tipped with white, and small carved boxes were used by the chiefs in which to keep them. Bunches of the white feathers of the albatross were worn in the ears; or the wings of the eagle, or hawk, were fastened to either side of the head, giving an effect like the winged cap of Mercury.

Their death heads, for this was the effect of tattooing which obliterated all expression save one of staring fierceness from the features, were stuck with flowers. The spectres dwelling on this far off and Stygian shore had the appearance of living in a transitional life. Their wars and feastings were left to them; the clemency of the climate gave them flowers and plumes of air for their adornment; and when their purgatory was atoned this shore would know them no more. They had a terrible solemnity which came from their slow tread and lack of expression. The filed and sharpened teeth, gleaming white from afar out of their darkened skulls, were never parted in a smile. Yet, for all this carnivorous and cannibal taint, they were no naked savages. These carrion men, condemned to this purgatory and to the devouring of each other's souls, came forward in their cloaks,

## HUNTING THE MOA

the insignia of their septs. We are to imagine that such mantles made their only clothing. The naked warriors, whenever not engaged in battle or in the games of war, draped themselves in these cloaks as does an athlete between the rounds of his contest. And, as fighting was their only life, the Maori warriors relapsed as to the rest of it into that curious and solemn impassivity that we have noticed, so that it is scarcely an exaggeration of image to call these mantles for their ease by the name of death cloaks. They were funeral finery, the trappings of the tomb.

But we will complete the historical possibilities of this antipodean world by mention of the hunting party upon which the Maori warriors might well have been engaged. It is, perhaps, the strangest of all such expeditions, the world over, this journey through the forest of epiphytes, of trailing orchids, to the cold foot of the snow hills. Their object was a gigantic bird, the Moa. This creature was to be found in plenty at the period when the first Maori arrived, and for a long time they were killed for food until such bulky and probably stupid birds reached to the point of extermination. Even so, it is probable that a few were still in existence at the time of Captain Cook's first voyage, and to this day several tolerably well authenticated stories have been afloat, from time to time, of whalers and sealers, and more recently of gold diggers in the South Island, having obtained glimpses of gigantic birds. But, more than this, it is even certain that bunches of its feathers were not long since in possession of some of the old chiefs as ornaments, and the spot where the last Moa was killed is still pointed out by the natives. Fragments of enormous eggs have from time to time been found, and some fifty years ago an entire egg was discovered. It appears that a man, in digging the foundation for a hut, suddenly came upon this egg, together with a human skeleton. The body had been buried in a sitting posture, and the egg must have been placed in the hands, as the arms of the skeleton were extended in such a manner as to bring it immediately opposite the mouth of the dead man. The egg was ten inches





THE MOA \*



## THE ROC'S EGG

in length and seven in breadth, the shell being brown in colour, and rather thicker than a shilling. The Moa, it may be said at this point, was no less than eleven feet six inches in height, or even, according to some authorities, thirteen or fourteen feet high. The legs of this giant, which would have to our eyes the thickness of a steel girder, reached to higher than the heads of its feather-crested hunters. It was, according to tradition, of a red colour.

There is a fascination in conjecturing the disturbance of this prehistoric ghost from its lair, and in wondering what kind of croaking or cackling cry it can have emitted. We may imagine the furious darting of its head, and the futile flapping of its embryonic wings. This roc, or fabulous bird, in its terror made vain and ineffectual attempts upon the air, that paradise out of which it had fallen. Its only safety was in the open country where it could outrun its pursuers; but some of their number headed it back into the bush, and it stood at bay waiting for the spears. This giant bird represented an antiquity of which its own bones were the only memorial; and in the slow agony of its death there is portrayed the cruel extinction of anything that has become useless and unnecessary. There was not a soul left to pity it: but a curious picture comes into the mind of the Maori standing near to it in its dying struggles and striking upwards with their clubs to reach its head. The straight red hair of the monster, for its feathers were more like straight hair, were dyed with blood. But the eventual plucking of its feathers was more horrible still, when the bird was trussed and gutted for the feast, its huge legs drawn up like cranes beside the body or laid out straight, and more than six feet long. The breaking of its knee bones called for as much strength as the cracking of a skull. The traveller from another world, who having landed from a ship found his way to their bivouac, would have known no sane explanation of this enormous fowl roasting in the embers, or of the roc's egg stolen from the nest and littering the ground with splinters of its broken shell. No supper of aero-

## THE ARMADA, OR SHOAL OF MAIDENS

nauts, even of that sort who might be imagined to dwell in the higher reaches of the air and only occasionally to come to earth, would have found for themselves a winged creature on such a parallel to their calling. And this brings us to the ghost-like figures round the fire, who rustled in their cloaks of feathers every time they moved. The stainings of that magical yolk were on their hands and clothes, so that this race of bird men proved their cannibal proclivities even in this feast.

Next morning, nothing but huge bones lay upon the ground and the Maori had gone down from the mountains to the sea-shore. The shadow of a jade sceptre fell like moonlight upon the paler bodies of the young girls. They passed all their leisure upon the beach, amusing themselves, when not in the water, with flying kites made of leaves and throwing mimic spears formed of fern stalks; or sailing their little flax canoes down the rivers and watching them tossed about by the waves of the sea. For dancing, their bodies were painted a golden yellow with turmeric and coconut oil.

But their main recreation was in the sea, for they swam like fishes and would move in a school or shoal out in the deep waters, breaking the placid bay. It is easy to imagine them running in chorus upon the sands and swimming out to a schooner of which the white wings had just shewn above the headland. They would sport like dolphins round the bows and draw the sailors to the wooden sides. In a moment they would catch the end of a rope dangled in the water and swarm up it, one after another, to the deck. They came up out of the sea a second time upon the ship's sides, straddling on the rail. First, their smiling faces with the clianthus, or another flower, dripping at their ears; then, other girls, more of ocean, with white feathers of the albatross; then, smooth shoulders and lower heads crowned with flowers.

By now, the first and most daring rode astride upon the rail, and in a breath stood on the deck. One after another they came up gleaming from the water, rode the wooden rail, and in a

## THEY CLIMB ON BOARD

moment stood like the pillar of a rainbow upon the deck. Those gleaming, shining pillars played like fountains; while flower-wreathed heads and glistening shoulders climbed up again and again out of the sea and became limbs and bodies pouring water down. Two or three girls at a time rode like naked Amazons upon the rail and leaped down to join the rainbow. And, as air dried the spray upon them, their burnt and nectarine colour came back, like the flush of shame or shyness upon their cheeks. By this, all their number had emerged out of the sea and the hindmost, finding no room to stand, showed as whole statues upon the rail, holding with an uplifted arm to the shrouds. These ropes, like the ribs or stays of this wooden ship, felt the cut and swish of the waters and the dying speed, drawing down to anchor. But the sudden invasion of these nymphs had so disconcerted the crew that, without touching them, and hardly having laughed or spoken, the whole school or shoal of sea maidens climbed like acrobats into the rigging.

This ascent was a ravishment to the eyes. Their savage figures made a bewilderment of lovely forms. Some climbed the ladders, and stretched as if they climbed a face of rock for the rungs were well apart, flattening the body; other girls swarmed upon a rope, hugging it close and tight as if it were a lioness gnawing and licking a bone. The rigging was a core upon which they climbed in both directions, their bodies facing each other through the meshes, so that a figure seen from the back was the echo to another body climbing directly in front of the eyes. The shrouds of the schooner were as populous as those of the glass ships, made early in the last century, that are crowded with sailors, blue mannikins manning the yards to the topgallants, like a ship dressed for review. Here, also, the ropes were rods of glass or of fire, crossing the bodies and not hiding them; when, of a sudden, each figure stood up to its height, alone and with no support, and leapt from every altitude of the rigging down into the sea.

Some fell from the highest yard-arm, straight down, feet

## THEY CLIMB ON BOARD

foremost, passing in front of the eyes like a statue falling, dislodged and dropped; other girls leaned over, bending their bodies and, when taut enough, like an arrow from a bow shot down into the hollow sea. More and more bodies dropped, too quick to count, and there were pairs of girls who stood for an instant face to face, or even back to back, and fell linked in each other's arms to the ocean. In a moment not one was left, and the school or shoal with wild play of foam headed for the land.

If we place this crowded scene of spray against a landscape resembling that of the coral atoll there will be only this difference that its inner solitude is not invoked. But so little change is entailed that no more is meant by it than the act of walking for a few paces to look on the salt waters instead of the sweet. And what we see is the emergence of this school or shoal. All their voices are talking at once, and they pass the headland like the dolphin herd playing through the swell.

They deviate to where a blue wave lifts and climb with it, their bodies tossing as flowers upon it, and lie helpless in the crest of it until it breaks and shivers; or leap below its backbone in a lovely arc and lie still for the foam to come. Their game is the coolness of the breaking waves. Some turn to meet this, holding up their arms so that all the force strikes upon their bodies. They wait for it, treading water, and it lifts and thrills them. Others reach to it and climb upon its back, close to the white mane, held high enough to see the sunlit shore. This is a sip of honey and no more. They stand just for a moment and the cataclysm comes, hurling them from heaven into the glaucous twilight below the waves. Or, if it overtakes them, lie sideways as if for the chariot to pass by. And, all this time, the school or shoal advances until their feet touch the ground and after a stroke or two they stand.

At the first smooth shoulders coming from the sea a loud and warning conch shell is blown from the shore. It is a sea voice, as if a bearded mouth, dank with weeds and spray, blew into the whorls and flutings of the shell. This rumbling of the ma-

## THE CONCH SHELL

rine conch echoes and reverberates along the hollow shore. It is a sound unknown to our ears and only familiar to mock Indians of the Antipodes. At once, the response rises out of the sea in this returning shoal. No catspaw of wind, far out in the blue main, could have brought the sea god more quickly to the surface and to skim the waves. His train, waist high and grounded in the shallows, tread the first corals of the atoll. Their figures on the stepping stones sway and hesitate, falling up to their shoulders into the coolness, and then finding foothold upon a higher ledge that raises them to the knees out of the water. They are on dolphin back, or standing in the chariot; yet, by analogy of melancholy, it is once more the stepping stones and that distant ghost moves among them, answering the conch shell. Till now, she cannot be distinguished from the rest, where all are uniform in hue and shape, pouring like rainy statues, like the bronze statues of the fountain, in rainbow spray.

But, at least, if these are figures of a magical fountain, the spell has been lifted from them. The school or shoal of maidens has come ashore upon the atoll. One after another they are only ankle deep, wading out of the water, while the emptiness of the coral isle has nothing to distract the eyes from those dripping and shining figures. Their play is against two horizontal bars, the line where the sea meets the sky, and the disk or circle of the atoll. Within this, the sweet waters of the lagoon make another ring.

The simplicity of the setting could not be improved upon for this play of sculpture. The foam-born figures loom large and larger; and in their wet freshness it is as if wrappings of weeds, of sea-green tresses crackling in their pods, had been taken from them at the water's edge. It has left a stain of iodine upon their limbs, or it is the verdigris brought out by water playing upon bronze. The marks of it are indelible upon the skin, like the pourings of some essence, or some essential oil upon them. Its tarnishings are the only ornament in this stern reality.

For it is the Indian pantheon, or arcana of all her nymphs and

## STATUES ON THE SHORE

goddesses. This remote and only imagined shore, given that appellation because of the part ever played by the Indies in poetry and imagination, is the scene of this emergence straight up out of the sea. It is prolix and many limbed, like the Hindu fancy, but corrected from that redundancy by a classical purity that draws its strength from the canons of savage beauty. This is the discovery of the age we live in and its implications affect every utility of the modern world. It is timeless, with no ties of place or date. Against the simple lines of the atoll and the ocean this alphabet spells forth its syllables in new and endless combination. Their sudden appearance from nothing, out of the sea, is the measure of their divinity and inspiration. Compared to this, how slow and languid is the near past, of wine-coloured velvet, with the tones of a virginal stealing upon the ears and a lapdog at the feet of Venus, in a lute-livened noon under the brocaded boughs. That was long ago, the age of Titian; too long ago, yet not long enough. For this is more bold than that Italian ease.

The cosmogony increases and gives birth. Their paradise of the primitive mind blossoms at the sea's edge, as it might be the primal invasion of flowers upon the protozoic land. It is coral, built up out of the sea in a million years of toil, now brought to fruition in the miracle of a moment. And, to anyone who witnessed this, his own phantoms would mingle with the crowd. But, even before this, it is the dispersal of the images of every other age and culture. The constrictions of their needs and fashions were the perversions of this primal form. If its rediscovery is the fine metal of our age, here are the auriferous Indies, untrammelled and undismayed.

The pedestals of coral lift their statues in every attitude into the open airs. It is an invocation of sunlight and the cool sea, for still they run with water which shines upon the copper of their skins; but we impute the ghosts of flowers to answer the curves of their bodies in this empty atoll, putting the sword of a cactus or the almond bough beside them for their recoil from the



## STATUES ON THE SHORE

painful points or an excuse for their allurements. And yet this emptiness of background makes the true poignancy of our Antipodes. It is another world still untired and in its youth; also, our own adolescence, something sighed over and not always enjoyed. Here and now, it is offered us again, burning all in a moment. It becomes incarnate, growing downwards from those flower-wreathed heads.

In only a moment this school or shoal of maidens will be gone. But this is that intermediate moment, the one other sensation in life between the pangs of birth and the agony of death. They only offer themselves for an instant of time, and then will be gone as swiftly and suddenly as if the sea took them back again.

Already the fountains have ceased playing. The bodies of bronze and copper drip no more with water, and their return to earthliness is the affirmation of their strong and athletic grace. If, each in each, these were the figures for a fountain, they had been chosen for strength and delicacy, narrow in the hips, but with arms muscular enough to lift a full amphora to their shoulder; or even, in the manner of a dancer, to support a body of their own weight and carry it to the jet of waters. Held in the heart of light, and with water running from their limbs, that pair of figures would be the climacteric of this pagan vision on the atoll. But, even now, this is played and performed. The nymphs and goddesses of the arcana, like dancers or milkmaids of the Indian god, portray the pleasures of poetic heat. But it is not the fabled India, for they are pagans and have no belief. This is their link with our own age, and part of their loveliness to our eyes.

For the last time we look upon this dolphin herd who sported in the waves and, come ashore, have played the fable of adolescence in a manner and with an ease to which our millenniums of false beliefs have unaccustomed us. They are unfettered; but our own epoch having broken its chains is too old to profit by its liberty. Thus, the two ages are of mortal contact to each other: each would kill the other at a touch. We should die in a

## STATUES ON THE SHORE

desert of the mind, while they would perish of our sophistication. Like statues of oiled bronze the nubile Oceanians display their graces to the empty atoll. They are as alike as animals of a breed, in savage similarity, as alike as the dolphin-herd among the waves, their only differences being forgotten in the next snaring of the eyes. They show, in fact, that fixed or semi-rule of resemblance which makes everyone at a masqued ball so alike as to be indistinguishable because the visible expression is masqued and so there is no key to their character. It is, then, that minor differences assume dramatic importance; and now, in this last moment of the arcana, the many-limbed anthropomorphic goddess sheds her divinity and disperses it among her devotees.

Our noon of the clianthus is drawing to an end. The Oceanian solstice has accomplished its purpose in preparing a solitude and peopling it from the sea. We have already said that, to anyone who witnessed this, his own phantoms would mingle with the crowd; and the last sacrament of this vision, or serving round of its godhead, discovers a ghost among the sunburnt bodies of the atoll and imbues her with the skin of saffron and the gilded hair that makes her paler than her sisters, until, by contrast to their dark bodies, her colour becomes warm and smoky, as if there were smoke or fire of sulphur under the surface. In fact, that ghost of the inner lagoon has crossed from the sweet to the salt waters. This is a symbolical act: it makes her unattainable among the crowd in which she is willing to lose her identity, and it is the sign that she prefers the group-soul to her own individual soul. In this general anonymity the unmasking, indeed, is still to come. But this Oceania, which was our refuge, dies anew, of inanition. Farewell to the clianthus, and to the paradise inspired by its red husks! Those lovely forms loom for the last time, larger than life, in the manner of figures upon the screen that advance on the audience till the moment of contact and then stride like giants over our heads into limbo. Life and intelligence are disseminated from their eyes and from their smiling mouths; while their material or venal person is represented

## THE SECOND ESCURIAL

in no more import than as it might be by the petals opening from the calyx. Their virginity of contact is that of flowers blowing upon the wind, in apparent carelessness and happy among their sisters. At the same time, the more than burning metal of their colour, together with the cut of their petals, is designed for attention, not calculated for neglect. It is with shuddering impact, shuddering the soul, that they answer the summons of the marine conch. And the Oceanian evening opens to them its archipelagos of light, flowering meadows unbreathed and unattainable but shuddering before the eyes, while nocturnal scents come upon the cooler air and the last rumbling of the sea shell dies in its throat of pearl.

The solitude is broken. This had been a paradise, or desert, to call it by the name given by mediaeval monks to a wilderness in which they sought tranquillity. Such, for instance, was the forest or desert of the Grande Chartreuse. It was among those wet woods that the white-robed Carthusians took their weekly walks and could meditate upon the world they had left, until, at a turn among the rainy pine trees, the grey walls of the monastery and its black roofs of slate stood up near at hand out of the mist, and the raindrops falling from its eaves boomed out in that loneliness as loudly as the chapel bell that woke them from their dreams. But that second Escurial in the woods of Dauphiné must not be used by us for more than an illustration of our meaning. Our purpose was to indicate a solitude; and behind those stark walls it is needless to insist that the monks enjoyed spiritual happiness. It magnified little things, making of a fruit tree in blossom or a row of little flowers in their garden an excitement as intense as any pleasure of things known and tasted. This, then, is in some senses its contingency to the scenes just described. The purpose of their withdrawal from the world was achieved in this exaggeration of simple delights. But their knowledge that the outside world was continuing in its ways, without heeding them, was the very soil of their solitude and its encouragement into blossom.

## THE SECOND ESCURIAL

Perhaps the meaning of this paradise from which we have now returned is most easily explained by the mere reversal or transposition of one of the most ordinary traits of character to be found in human nature. The ease of carrying a personal image in one's mind, so that, however far away and remote, there is at least this or that ghost of a person to comfort one, is here changed for its antithesis of travelling great distances in the imagination while actually speaking to, and being continually in the company of, the person concerned. It is, indeed, the prime pleasure of poetical fancy, and even, indeed, the chief symptom of that. If its malady is restlessness and the discontent that prefers always the unknown to the known, this is its search after perfection. The elusiveness of that quarry, for it is an object impossible of attainment, is both the tragedy and the attraction of this situation. But, perhaps, its most extreme form of infection is to be found in the nostalgia for far-away places and the desire to be anywhere but in the environment of the moment. Admittedly this fault or fissure in temperament is a defect and not an advantage, but it has been the instigation of most of poetry and, at least, those who have suffered from this disease are best qualified to speak of it. Germs of this are to be found in the universal bloodstream, so that there is no one who can plead ignorance of its effects. The rapidity of our return is, thus, easily explained.

It is to the intermittent music of the ballroom. Being free of this, and able to speak to the dancers, has been the origin of every stage of our escape from reality. Its progress may have taken no longer in actual time than could be spent in reading these few pages, and that is but a fragment of the long-drawn evening. But the growth of its symbolism is easily explained upon the lines that have been indicated. They are the symptoms of a state of mind. This builds rapidly and elaborately round the focus of attention. There is no living being who can say that his heart is proof against this whirlwind. It was blowing in the beginning of things, and those who persevere to the end will

## THE MASQUED BALL

hear again the frightful rushing and roaring of its blast in token that for this, at least, there is never death. The beating of its wings is audible above every other noise of life, and nothing else but this is the agony of the nerves as written down in these pages. The delights of this state of feeling exist only in the constructions of the imagination, both at the moment and in retrospect. When the heat of the blood has died down there is little solace in such things. The success or unsuccess of these projects has only a small contingency to their perpetual pain and agony. Life begins and ends in suffering, as can be seen even in the pattern of this book. Its young maturity can hardly be anything but sad in the remembering; and, the more happy it may have been, the more mournful its recall. If its end is nothing, not even chaos, if the elaborate and infernal machinery of so many minds has no function when the heart stops, then, indeed, this agony is unrequited. That, in truth, would be the falsity of all imagining and the empty ending. It is in protection against this that heaven and hell were invented. Their disproving is a denial of everything but the bare bones of death. The longer or the shorter time during which these crumble into dust is no more than a wind among dead bones. The last crumb of comfort is taken away by the knowledge that there is not even a hell, and it would be better for us to believe in that up till the brink of chaos. Those who long for annihilation and for unending sleep must conceive of it in concrete terms, as of something which by its very perfection of peace is a definite and realizable state. It is the dreamless sleep of childhood which has deceived them. But the mere passage of time has an analogy to the chill of cold, and there is no state of forgetfulness or inanition that is in all respects incapable of change, for in its inception it was coeval with life, it was desired and therefore entered upon, and by no falsehood of the imagination can it be said that all feeling and every breath of the whirlwind has been absent from that empty nothing. This religion of turning the deaf ear is more false than any other. It is companionless and without memory. Not even

## THE MASQUED BALL

does it attach the bones crumbling into dust to the vestiges of what once was alive. For, at the worst, there is at least that for symbolism of death; and, given that, the bones build easily into a charnel house; the images of death take on human form; and, from parody, with clanking tread the drama stalks into tragedy, to the lyric fountain lip and to groves of myrtle. They are haunted, in the words of the poet, 'By the youths that died for love, Wand'ring in the myrtle grove';<sup>1</sup> and, indeed, the wandering and restless purgatory of that immortal couplet is a different future state from either heaven or hell. Its sister shade is our gallery of yews.

To those who are waiting down below in that shady corridor the masqued ball is still in progress, as it might be at the lighted windows of the castle, high above. It is so; and yet this is not the sleepy air of the country. This burning and fraying of the nerves could never be attained, except among a million souls in a metropolis of smoke and noise. But, since it is a state of the imagination, the sublimation of an universal mood, there is no need to tie it down to time and place. It can partake of both extremes; and all that is necessary to its reality is that it should have fire and strength of feeling. It is a masqued ball because the interest of that lies in the disguise, while its duality of purpose is achieved in the unmasking, or discovery of truth. But, even then, this is only comparative, it is only the face value, and of no more ultimate truth than the changing expression of the eyes. Reality must lie behind that, or more probably there is none. It is this double mystery, one being enclosed within the heart of the other, that makes the fascination of this problem in meaning. The wearing of masks, so far as the dancers are concerned, is as if they went into battle carrying armour. It is their defence as well as their disguise; not only that, but it affords them mass-protection, for they make an armoured crowd in which the problem is how to identify the leaders. Their martial panoply, again, is not the whole dress but only the mask, only the thin

<sup>1</sup>Alexander Pope.

## THE MASQUED BALL

black band of silk or velvet, hiding, but not covering the eyes. Nor does it conceal the eyes; if anything, it increases their sparkle. Eyes and the lips are left bare. This is an audacity of exposure; it is as if the heart was left unprotected under the armour. The most vulnerable parts, in point of recognition, are emphasized and held in view. A mask only covers the cheek bones and the tilt of the nose. Even though the soul of the face may be seen in the eyes, so long as the bony or material parts are hidden all identity is lost. The force of this truth amounts to a message denying the soul any existence apart from its dwelling place of flesh and bone. The immortal soul, a state that is of obvious contradiction since it is born anew and different in every instance, is not recognizable even in life, away from its personal structure. It is all the more difficult, therefore, to believe in survival of the one without the other. Each soul, as to its body, is like a blossoming of the bare bones; and, when its parent dies, immediately the florescence withers. As to the after life of any work or deed accomplished in lifetime, this, save in exceptional instances, amounts to no more than the pressing of a dead flower between the leaves of a book. It is only when that posthumous flowering is of a brilliance out of all parallel to its starved and stunted condition during life that some shadow of what was once a living person is projected beyond his death. So we see that this masking of the face for purposes of pleasure has led us into a consideration of all that is most mortal in man. If this be so, here at the masqued ball, where mortal beauty is the only discovery underneath the mask, we are dealing with the most transient of living qualities. But, even so, it is the lasting truth, the heart or response behind this intoxication, that is the terror of its attraction. And, in conclusion, the truth must be as illusory as fleeting and fading beauty, as the lifting of the mask. For truth is impossible to the eyes of the victims. Not even when liberty is regained and the spell is broken can reliance be placed in the evidence of the eyes, for they were paid agents of the heart. Theirs is tainted witness, corrupted in the beginning.

## THE MASQUED BALL

The unmasking, which is so near now, comes at the climax or watershed of all the light that can be thrown upon it, not only in the preliminary stresses of that dire excitement, but in the very moment itself and in the light of all subsequent experience. It is the climacteric, or crisis of the spirit, from which every other emotion declines and fades. This is because all the fate of those streams is described in that moment; from their origin at the fountain foot to their dispersal into the general sea; from those which were tributary to other streams, swelling eventually their swifter current, to those which died among the sedges and were lost in sand. Their eventual fate must be visible in that moment, yet they must be seen in the light of first discovery, as, also, in the very climax of their individual existence. This may sound impossible of achievement, but if a known occasion looked back upon in memory is coloured, as is ever the case, in the light of all that has come after it, how much more easily is this accomplished when the incident is a symposium, a celebration or synthesis of these different histories, gathered together into an hour, and expressed in the finished knowledge of their courses. This masqued ball is that symbolical occasion.

It is all the evenings of adolescence assembled into one summer night. The warm airs of the river must tally with the rush of air behind the windscreen, and the apprehension of endless corridors, in simile of waiting and uncertainty, finds its echo or reward in the theatre. By masking, which is the concealment of what is vital in these episodes, all the mysteries attendant upon them remain to be solved. Meanwhile, the force of these anticipations is apparent in the character displayed by the travesties. It is even possible to consider these as clues to the truth, though the meaning and accuracy of their symbolism, like those tricks of conjuring which seem so easy once they have been explained, will only be apparent when it is too late. For this efficacy their design is of so many arrows pointing at the heart. The direction of those glittering shafts can quickly be guessed but not the



THE THREE PHANTOMS OF THE BALLROOM  
secret passages, hewn in some cases out of what is equivalent to the living rock, and leading ubiquitously into the inner and mortal core. The existence of that is a certainty under the armour, but it is in vain to listen for its beating since that is the last surrender, and final and ultimate collapse of the defences. At this late hour their armour of the mask is still intact. Till now, no hand has lifted up the visor.

The three phantoms of the ballroom are abroad again in the travesties drawn by Gavarni. In their centre comes that figure who walks in cavalier manner with a tapering stick held in her hand. She is, therefore, in some sense, the chief among the masks. On either side of her go the two other girls in their dissonance of fairness and darkness; the one in her ruched white pantaloons, her ruched sleeves tied with red ribbons, and wearing the hat from which a trailing meteor's tail of ribbon floats out far behind her as she walks. The other, in tartan of black and red with red and white stockings, wearing her white apron and jet-black bodice, with scarf of rose and a hat which is the parody of a Highland bonnet. She is the smallest of the three, for the other two girls are the same height up to the fronds of their hair. But even a mask cannot hide the different expressions of their mouths. In the centre figure it is beautiful and friendly. Nothing cruel or sinister is possible to it; yet, more than the other two, she has a curiosity in others and is here, not for admiration alone, but in order to take notice for herself. It is of constrained softness in the fair-haired figure at her side, a selfishness and defiance which is, at once, her beauty and her ruin. She affects to despise those who admire her and is, therefore, lonely within that shell where she has imprisoned her pride. She is too strong to allow entrance to others and too weak to make her own escape. She will be kind to animals and not to men, will like those who do not like her, and be silent when everything should be said. In short, with the eyes open she can only be admired but not loved, but, the moment the eyes are closed, it is possible to be in love with her personality and forget her ap-

THE THREE PHANTOMS OF THE BALLROOM  
pearance. Yet, all of her is expressed in the sullen carmine of her lips. Even in the sharp red curves of that mouth, in echo of the atoll, there is temptation and the taste of blood.

Her companion could not be more different. The provocation of that lower lip, as sullen and purposeful as the poses in which she stands, gives place to a character that is different in every essential, even from the tilt of the nose below the laughing mask. In this, the curves of the upper lip have an upturned and soaring flight in indication of her happy temper and contentment in small things. They lift, as if the whole face was smiling and they were half the smile, into the laughing eyes; and it is even to be seen, below the mask, that the cut of her nostrils is in exact or lyrelike harmony to her bowl-like lips. About her lips and nostrils there is, indeed, something so ingenious in its fancifulness that nothing but the leaves of a tulip tree can be compared to them for neatness and precision. Their expression is of self-sufficiency and satisfaction in little things. They have an equanimity that nothing should disturb because they are incapable of doing harm. This temper is fortified by independence of soul. Furthermore, her mask is worn with most assurance of the three, not in disguise but as though travesty was an end in itself. This is her practice or profession, and the proofs of it are in her ease. And, finally, though she is so small compared to the other two, as though she belonged to a different and professional race, the purposes of it are apparent the moment she stands by herself for she appears taller than the others, dwelling in the lights of the ballroom as though this was her true home, the lit grotto of the stage.

In a moment the music stops and the masks fall. At once, truth fades from the lips and mounts into the eyes. When the masks are dropped moonlight comes out of the dark clouds. This is no revelation of identity, but it is the darkness and mystery of character, deepest of human mysteries, suffused with a light of its own, lit from within, and showing the workings of its own heart. The seat of this hidden intelligence is in the eyes;

## THE UNMASKING

and now it floods their surface. It is the surmise of the lips, confirmed and strengthened, but this is their inner meaning, not the painted platitude. That was painted upon the lips, reddening to choice. Feeding the lips with a red, more subtle or more piercing, can only sharpen their curving lines, accent the cut of their red edges, heighten their cruelty and their hold upon the blood. When, at the dropping of the mask, meaning mounts from the lips into the eyes, it is the addition of intelligence to the animal body. That other was instinctive beauty, but this is of the spirit and informed. It answers from its depths, as meaning answering meaning. Such is the wordless speech of dying men; and in the world of spectres the reality of a phantom vision is only assured when glance meets glance in proof that it is of mutual apparition. In all ghost stories this is of rarest occurrence and does really speak of communication in time, as if, in that moment's mutual glance, the walls of time had fallen and vision was achieved from one world of time into another. In life, if all of the face but not the eyes is seen, and then the eyes open and are unmasked, the miracle is not less astonishing. This, no less than that, is the survival of the soul.

The fall of the masks has not less than altered the whole psychology of the drama. It is played from a different point of view when disguise is dropped. This is the change between character acting, when the actor prides himself upon the lengths to which he can carry the creation of a new part, which must be different in every essential and not to be recognized from the last role that he played, and that other kind of acting in which the protagonist's appearance remains unaltered so that he can only undertake a part if it is already moulded to the personality that he is known to possess. This change has been from the former to the latter disposition. Now that they are unmasked, the travesties are no longer independent creations to be worked to the utmost point of fantasy of which they are capable; they are, instead, directed entirely by the appearance, tone of voice, and expression of the wearer. They have become the clothes or

## THE UNMASKING

weeds of their owners; in outward display of the inner senses, and, of these, not least of all, the eyes.

But this generalization is premature, because their unmasking must take place one by one. In order to do this the hair must be drawn back so as to uncover the ears. Then, lifting the string from behind the lobes, the mask will fall forward into the other hand. Each time this happens, while a different perfume breathes forth from the locks of hair, her head is lower than one's shoulder in reminder of how small women must be, and for a moment the untying of the mask hides the eyes altogether and everything that is recognizable of the face except the laughing mouth. In this moment she was never less herself than now. It is only the ears that have become wholly visible in evidence, and their baring to the sight is a daring exposure or provocation. They are an inner defence, and their testimony is hardly less valuable than that of the eyes.

This is their unmasking, one by one. First comes the pantaloons, white trousered, with her ruched legs and ruched sleeves knotted with the red ribbons. Unique character is given to this figure by her long, thin waist, the lovely length of her neck, and that curious anomaly of her stride, as barefoot in the water meadows or upon the stepping stones. It is, again, the contrast of her ghost, seen under the damson bough and upon the empty atoll, to this sophistication of the ballroom. The strings of her mask draw the fingers into her hair, the shell-like or rippled curls of which tremble above the ears, glittering so finely in their particles of gold that they should gild the hands. Where they are lifted, in a moment they have sprung back again, intact in their curls, the fronds lapping over one another, as close as feathers, like a dove's breast down into the neck. The top of the ear is hidden underneath them, lying back as near to the head as it can get. This is her reticence; and it is bespoken in their thin and shallow shells, the ear being small even in comparison to the smallness of her skull. When the string of the mask is unloosed from behind them, and lifted out of that little animal warmth



TRAVESTISSEMENT BY GAVARNI  
FROM 'LA MODE', 1831, PLATE 116



## TRUTH OUT OF THE EYES

that it left with a red line from its pressure, the ear springs back, too, like the leaf of a sapling, and hides underneath the hair. But the lifting of her mask has made her close her eyes so that they open as though after a moment's sleep. With their rebirth into life it is possible to read from them past, present and future, as it affects this embodiment of one of life's obsessions.

They are eyes that have no fire of colour in themselves, in their grey-blue stones, but need an aid or direction and then match themselves to that background or burn into a betterment upon blue feathers or blue clothes. Their brightness is more of day, perhaps, than of night; and, here, the glitter of the ballroom lights has contracted the pupils to what would be their dimension under tropical sunlight, in that shadeless glare that darkens the skin. The pupils are, in fact, small, with only the thinnest rim of black velvet to the iris, whence come the character and the colour. The reading of her fortune must take note of this peculiarity for it is of more certain import than any lines of the hand. It is, indeed, no less than the direct indication of her temperament and disposition. The hard points of the pupils mark the contraction of her ego into an inward-growing independence which will harden and intensify with age. Nothing can prevent this, for it is inherited. Every year that passes binds the certainty and makes it inevitable. The improbability that it can ever be broken only increases with the ratio of this recession. In her solitude, if it is to remain such, she will liken more and more to her own relations, as though relapsing into the native bedrock of family character, the mass of which to a depth of many generations has been riven by great fissures of suppressed feeling, cleft from top to bottom by religion, or in blindness has ignored the proper subjects for its affection in order to pursue one unsuccessful quarry after another, only leading back again into emptiness, and, in the end, to age. If this is her ego, or true self, as revealed in the pupils of her eyes, their outer rims will yield evidence as to her external personality.

## TRUTH OUT OF THE EYES

This is that amount of her which her own decisions can colour and change. It is, therefore, in part, manner and appearance; but not entirely, for these things have to be built up on the foundations of what is there already. Physical appearance can be altered more easily than personality, but even that cannot divagate from its type. It must be the development of natural suggestion. Too much emphasis upon that can only end in pose and exaggeration. This is what is written in the thinness of those rims. There is great development out of the normal, but not sufficient strength of character to support the change. It will fail when it is put to the test and will not be able to follow up its own inclinations to their logical development. And yet, in spite of this, there is fascination even in the little way that it has travelled; and this is the charm of independence, in that structure of liberty upon childish ambition.

Last of all there is the iris of the eyes. This is the physical appearance or embodiment of what has gone before. Those qualities of the soul and spirit are here expressed in flesh and blood. Their colouring is for admiration, and in order to effect her purposes of conquest. It is idle, therefore, to look to them for mercy, since this can only come after success has been won. Their grey-blue matrix, even so, has an appearance of greater boldness than it really possesses, for, as we have said, it does not impose its own colour but takes it from the surroundings. If these are chosen on purpose to accentuate that colour it is the proving of our argument. A reliance upon external things is the weakness of her flesh. It cannot stand alone; but, at least, it is clever enough to make its following of fashion from a detriment into a quality. Its power, or beauty, has this exceptional dimension, that it seizes and assumes the moment, so that the enjoyment of its pleasures is the devouring of the present time while it is alive and moving. The bite of it runs through the blood. It is juvenation; not the renewal of youth, but its consummation throughout the senses. Soul and memory are steeped in the dye of it. Because this had its origin in such far-off places



## TRUTH OUT OF THE EYES

leading to a distant and remote imagery, the perfection of the diverse parts out of which it is composed and the complete personality which is its outcome are combined into a body which is unique and ineffable. The coordination into harmony of so many dissonant or unlikely factors makes the marvel of this achievement. If it is difficult to impute so much to that equivocal expression or to that look of disdain there is, at least, the assurance of accomplishment behind it.

Yet this is its totality; it leaves nothing hidden. There is no more to it than this. Its wonder lies in the unity of its presentation, with nothing discordant where so much had been difficult or intractable. The success of it is to a great extent the product of will, which can alter physical things as much as it can affect material affairs. Yet even the strength of these forces is not able to make her happy. It is a fault of temperament and nothing can remedy it. This drag will impede every movement that she makes towards happiness; it saps her vitality and throws its weight upon her companions. This is a spiritual, not a physical imperfection. No defect of that latter kind could be arraigned against her. The totality of her appearance, to those who are her admirers, will counteract those other failings. And this physical intelligence, or will to beauty, as against those other centres that are the brain and heart, we must attribute in their fleshly sense to her eyes, where, as we have already proved, its centre is the iris of the eye more than the pupils or the thin, black rims. The ghost or spiritual incarnation of her physical beauty is to be seen there personified.

The second of the masks, when it is untied, holds a message so diametrically different that it is hard to reconcile it with the character revealed only a moment ago. It has no points of contact with the other travesty but is so widely separated in every way that it represents another species, discovered, as it were, in another continent, grown to different form and colour, and only preserving in certain fundamental secrets of structure the fact that it belongs to the same race of creation, and, even though

## TRUTH OUT OF THE EYES

it be in another land, walks the same earth and is ruled by a few, at least, of the same characteristics.

When her mask falls, the fascination of small things brought to perfection meets the eyes. The smile is ready, as if to the drawing wide of the curtain. It lives on the surface of the eyes, a *fleur d'eau* with the green or hazel of the iris. The darkened lashes fringe and make more intense this pouring out of light. For it is that and nothing else. The radiance darts out from the pupils, and the splinters of its yellow rays, like rayed parheliions, or mock-suns, burn over into the ether or iris of the eye in a whorl of little flames. It burns into perfection at the smiling mouth, of which the white and even teeth are the instrument, conveying, somehow, the animal reality of this live being, who in a sense could be compared to a toothed and carnivorous fruit, crediting this impossibility to some tropical fruit such as the mangosteen, while bearing in mind the insectivorous orchids which can destroy honey bees or even hummingbirds. It is the fact that such mouths eat meat that is, at once, the disillusionment of their delicacy and the assurance that they are venal and that blood runs in their bodies to be chilled or warmed. Another corroboration is the tilting of the nose, which it is impossible to look upon seriously for it is clearly meant to please the eyes. This it achieves as readily as the smiling mouth, so that the whole impression is one of good humour and contentment, though this is lifted out of its ordinary associations by the exceptional beauty of the person in whom it is embodied. For it is but rarely that both these qualities are found together and their condominium is the peculiar merit of this personality. Her wide eyes and large mouth compared with the smallness of her wrists is in sign of generous disposition rising out of her miniature frame with the insistence that is ever the rule with small purses. But the completed form of this travesty cannot be visible except in its own true sphere. Its unmasking is no more than an introduction to its real profession. That is, in itself, the art of travesty in, perhaps, the most telling and important of its branches.



TRAVESTISSEMENT BY GAVARNI  
FROM 'LA MODE', 1831, PLATE 121



## TRUTH OUT OF THE EYES

Therefore, the mere removal of the mask only reveals her at the start of her potentiality. It is no more than the lifting of the curtain. The exploration of that talent must wait for its proper opportunity, later on in this book; and here we must be contented with its superficial investigation, until we meet with it again in its proper sphere, unmasked, and dwelling in the theatre lights.

Meanwhile the third travesty, who is principal and most enduringly important of the three, lifts her fingers to her mask as if to loosen the strings, and then, as though of premeditation, lets fall her hand again. This gesture is not hesitant or doubtful; it is done in assurance of her supremacy. She remains masked because her identity is known to all. Below the black edges of the velvet her lips are curved slightly in amusement. This principal and chief of the three travesties is, herself, a spectator, being indeed, with the creator of these scenes, the only witness among so many participants. She is the only other person alive to their meaning and can be indifferent, but not incurious, as to their progress. It is for this that she is smiling, but not enough to show her white and even teeth. It would make the heart that loves her tremble to remember this, or recall the first time that he looked upon that embodiment of beauty in benevolence. Her smiling mouth was the first sign of this, coming out of a new and, then, untroubled world. Her huge eyes were its next indication and a Creole softness as of winter in the south in air of the balmy thickets. Its proof was her saffron skin. The assurance of this figure in a world of doubts and disbeliefs made his heart tremble and the earth shake beneath his feet. All his senses were on fire with it, neglecting everything but its attacks. Yet its impact was of warmth and comfort, in temperament of the booming south; though, by contradiction, the home of this force of certainty and simplicity lay to the north in a winter of sledge bells and frozen rivers. The snow would be shovelled into high banks, as high as a wall, to either side of the path, and the maple trees had, long ago, shed their dying flukes to the ground. This was where she went as a little girl; or, before the

## TRUTH OUT OF THE EYES

spring had come, and between the seasons, met the lumber sledges drawing down the logs, and, climbing up into them, tasted the sweet sap that ran out of the timber, loving maple sugar ever afterwards, for its evocation of the bright lights of winter, the steaming breath and jangling sledge bells in the snow.

In a new land where there is no art, where men are drones, shade and accent are given to life by the women, who, by a natural law, assume the plumage of mind and wit and are, in consequence, quicker and more fascinating than the women of old and dying lands. They have, also, the poise which their men are denied by circumstance, for their world is their own, and uncontested. This is their birthright; but it is not contaminated by their republican neighbours, for, already, they are a separate nationality, different in mind and in appearance from both their English forebears and their American contemporaries. They have characteristics that are found nowhere else and that, in themselves, constitute this difference so that all members of this race have a common likeness and are to be known and recognized, at once, in these similarities. It is in these qualities that they find their certainty of bearing and manner. But, in this particular instance, the mutual individuality was raised on to a still higher plane of personality by its tropical or exotic features. A Creole darkness, which tallies with an equatorial fairness, gave this contradiction in climate. It was like snow in the hot south, or like the booming of southern thunder in the frost and rime. It added something, by paradox, to the advantages with which it was born. The addition of this had softened the asperity of a new world where business and the office were all that mattered. This wonderful warmth, for it partook of its poetical origin and shed or disseminated a radiance of heat, was unique to this one character alone. It was this that impressed at the first meeting and all subsequent knowledge only confirmed that prophetic certainty. Its concomitant was a physical appearance that formed the exact instrument of these designs and carried that personality into achievement. Its engine of destruction, so far as this pur-

## TRUTH OUT OF THE EYES

pose of conquest was concerned, lay in the softness of her features, while the independence of this character and her obvious ability to look after herself were no less than the direct augmentation of those charms. Their contradiction by her extreme youth made the excitement and intrigue of the situation. At that early age the mystery of these probabilities was a problem that only time could prove and their premises had to be accepted at their first value in the infatuation of the moment. This was fatal enough to eliminate every other obstacle. But the after blindness, due to the exhaustion of this capture, shewed, as it gradually cleared away, the affirmation of every surmise, and every ambition. All was completely realized in the person that lived before the eyes.

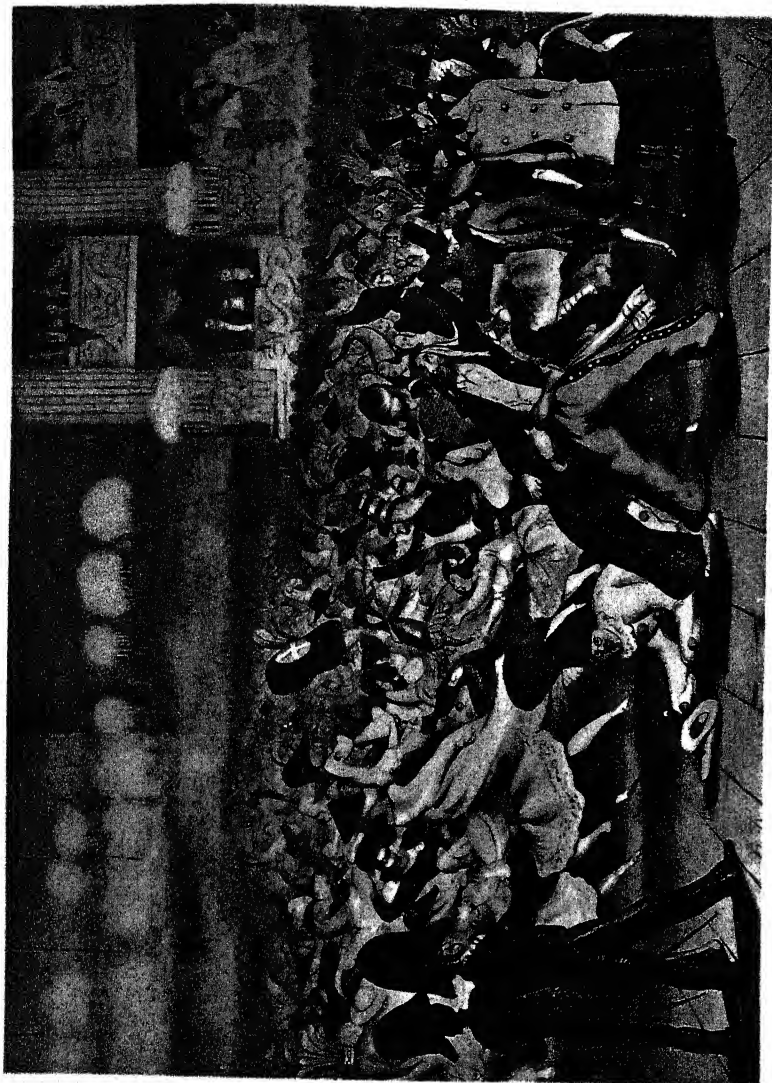
It is for this reason that she has not unmasked, for there is nothing to conceal. The depths of this character are so wholly consistent with her exterior that there is no difference between the expression in the eyes and the answer of the heart. Perhaps there is no human soul of whom this is so conspicuously true. Neither is there any other being in whom instinct goes hand in hand with understanding, nor another heart which beats in such harmony with the mind. Its talisman was a face, so sweetly and disturbingly rounded that Nature must have effected this for the conquest of one soul alone, and the destruction of others. Her eyes were the living instruments of this purpose, having no tones of dissonance and nothing that was not harmony and kindness.

Her origin, out of an untrammelled world, settled in Arcadian or bucolic plenty for two or three centuries, was the ghost inhabiting and directing her personality. It spoke of apple trees and pails of cream, of print gowns and curls of hair, for sophistication, or the far-off echo of it, first came to that land about the time of the Napoleonic Wars, in the train, as it were, of the Creole Josephine, of Madame Talleyrand, and of the lovely Elizabeth Patterson, the wife of Jerome Bonaparte. Nothing of the eighteenth or of earlier centuries can be expected of that en-

## TRUTH OUT OF THE EYES

vironment, but its descendants still display the mould into which their elegances were first poured and that epoch is marked upon them in their shape and bearing. It is conspicuous in this living example, upon whose traits are further superimposed the vitality of a new and large town, where money was easily made and equal opportunity made friends of all. This accounts for that open and unbiased character. Its other secrets are of a truth that must be locked for ever within the heart of her most intimate beholder. These are the flames that burn to their brightest in the dark and dreadful ends of life, and any contagion that may have spread elsewhere before that is but a spark of that benevolence falling upon inflammable ground. The kindling of it is no more than a row of little fires, soon dying to their embers, around a living flame. For there is never a fire that would not spread, and the absence of that principle in its life would be a denial of its danger and but the detriment of its own best quality. In the heat of its propinquity other and lesser things are bound to catch the flame. Yet this is no conflagration but only the falling of its white hot embers. Soon enough they quench of themselves and are extinguished. And always, if it were not for that near radiance, they would never have kindled. This is the penalty of that outward warmth and comfort, but its reward must lie in what it shelters. Its flames are nothing transient or hurting. They burn through all of youth into the dark and dreadful ends of life, most valued, now, before it is late, while the living flames still strike out from the heart. It is better to speak of them, now, while they are burning. For this is the end of adolescence. The unmasking is arraignment ended; and, after this, comes enjoyment or maturity. That battery of the nerves, and its painful and delicious tremblings are no more. Instead, there is knowledge and the certainty of what was only hazard before. Or so it seems: but where is any certainty except in the heart? Long before that all other things fade and fail. If maturity means material things, there is neither comfort nor certainty in that, and it would be better to be ever restless.





LE GALOP FINAL, BY DAUMIER



## DEATH MASKS

Let us heap this fire, with its own cinders, so that it burns through the night. The destruction of its own relics will keep it in flame till the morning. This is the falling and crumbling of its own defences. It is the way that life consumes itself, living upon its nerves, and never satisfied. The world of imagination and its delights are hollow and like tinkling glass, lit only with reflections. They have not even truth to run out of them at the heat. They are shivered fragments and sharp splinters. The images are paper-thin, or like shadows of thin paper. These metaphors of youth, these shades of silent introspection, lose their lives before they have found the words to speak. The white shroud of Gilles, the shadow in the gallery of yews, the shadeless atoll and its inhabitant, these things which are the symbols of adolescence must give place to other shades that are no more substantial because they are a little more mature. But these future pages, in order that they should be the interpretation of this later phase of life, must be more resolute and solid. The tone has gone from the strings of the orchestra to the brass.

After this dropping of the masks the ball must continue to its own waning. The masks dangle upon their strings as if they were something indispensable and ever necessary. They jolt and jostle upon their wearers' dresses and in their lifelessness, now that no eyes look through them, they have become the death masks of their owners. There is no parting with these. They are tied with strings: from the memory of when they were worn they are in the likeness of their wearers: and they share a common and universal similarity which is the taste of death, or perhaps we might say that it is the finger of death upon their lips. Had they not yet been worn they will be necessary one day, and are ever ready and at hand. This alternate but ultimate use is as certain as anything in the world can be and its ubiquity before the eyes is as easy of interpretation as it is to see the moon shining in the heavens at the same time as the sun. The dominion of the one follows upon the reign of the other. But, in this case, the next wearing of that mask, so far as each individual is concerned,

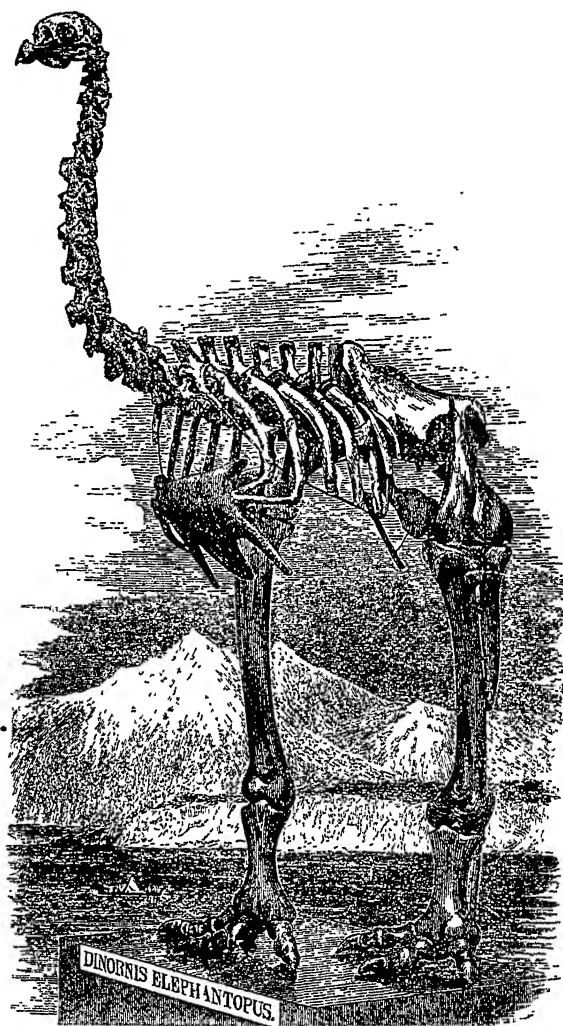
## GALOP FINAL

is the end. Here, hanging at their waists, we see their eternal decay. When they were masked we told their fortunes through their eyes just at the dropping of the strings, and now that future certainty, which is undisputed, is visible in the same orifice, below the black edge of the mask, where the lips lie, and in the two eyeholes. Thus, they hold their future with them, even at the masquerade.

Meanwhile, by retrogression of thought, these dying images appear again in pristine force. To the rhythm of pistons, as if to the slide of the clarionets in a galop by Offenbach, in the *Galop Final* of the ball, the whole concourse hurls itself to right and left, distorting their stature and the room. The giants in the foreground, in their cocked hats, ghosts of gendarmes or the garde nationale, stand still but are monstrously distended, blown this way and that upon the noisy tempest. The rest of the image is flapping and bellying of pantaloons, a mad and intoxicated orgy, leaping and falling with the music. Only the chandeliers are still, glittering in their lights, for the very walls of the room seem to open and shut with the rhythm. It can have no climax. It is a coda, continually renewed out of its own violence, with no sign of ebbing strength, and insistent until it falls and crashes. This world comes to an end with a bang and a terrible flourish, as if to the roaring of cannon and to cries of '*à Berlin*' sounding in the streets. It falls with the extinguishing of the lights, with the finger of death upon the candles.



IV  
THE BANQUET, OR CENACOLO



## IV

### THE BANQUET, OR CENACOLO

**I**t is at Magadha, within sight of the snows. It is not enough that the champak drenches the airs with the odour of its blue flowers. This is the paradise of flowering trees. The rose apple and the great tree of roses, a town of flowers, are like lights upon the brilliant air. But it is not enough.

A river runs through this land of groves and trees, and it has pure waters and fine flights of stone steps. Those glades are high arched, like banqueting halls, while the open spaces between the groves are courts or cloisters. The river banks, that are musical with a hundred voices chiming in harmony, make the halls or meadows of this college of repose. Its places of worship are caves cut into the hillside. All this immense region trembles with a presence. It is the god, who incarnates wisdom and the power to call down calmness and satisfaction. Also, this is not the wisdom of old age. It is embodied and implicit in someone of youth and high birth; otherwise the sacrifice, as, also, the miracle, are unavailing. Such is the land and the occasion: but this banquet or symposium is a meal without food. It begins with the rattling of a sistrum and the marine conch blown loud in the porch, which is built high enough to admit elephants and chariots. It is an arrival from the west, or the return of the Magi. At once there is a noise of thunder out of the clear sky, while drops of rain, the size of pearls or hazel nuts, fall to the ground.

The ambassadors have brought presents which will be played or unrolled later, and with the hydromel. Meanwhile, they have entered through the porch, and the god leaves his throne and advances to meet them. At that moment all living beings

## THE BANQUET, OR CENACOLO

feel their skins thrill with pleasure. The musical instruments of both gods and men sound their notes without being touched, and trees of all seasons break into flower. As for the *bodhisattva*, his skin, which is blue in hue, is powdered with sandalwood and he wears a golden robe. His hair, which is raised into a mitre, is dressed with cassia flowers. He is in the midst of his people. They are men and women of Ajanta, living undisturbed amid a fabulous plenty. This land of elephant and lotus is dwelt in by a race who are coffee skinned, or pale into the jasmine. Especially the women are lighter skinned than the men. They excel in movements and inflections of the hands and in seated or floating poses of the figure. Also, in tressing and arranging of the hair, no two alike among a hundred. For dress they have the pearls of Coromandel. These are the *gopīs* who are milkmaids and sacred ballerinas. Their sensuous beauties go hand in hand with the pleasures of the mind and they are as numerous as deer in this sacred park. For the banquet is continued under every tree, or upon the flights of steps above the water.

It is a world to which our eyes can never grow accustomed. Even the wheels of the chariots have their spokes like the rays of a sunflower. As for the men and women, their every movement has been trained in subtlety. They are more schooled in action and in repose than any race who have come down to us in art. This is the great India and its flower-hung days, given to wisdom. There are hermits under the fig trees and thunder, high up, upon the face of the mountains. The temptings of the god are upon every branch and at each turn of the waters, but it is immaterial to his sanctity. These are but the *gopīs*, and the descent of his godhead among them is no more than the practice of their charms. Painted upon the dark corners of the caves this world comes to life again with the torchlight. Processions which have been halted for centuries in the darkness go on their way once more; and, at the feast, cups are lifted to the lips and wisdom speaks again from, at least, the eyes. It is the school of peace and of mental repose. The wise men who have come back



## KRISHNA AND THE MILKMAIDS

out of the west resume their embassy under the torchlight and spread out their gifts. But it is not enough.

The god takes possession of the earth by advancing seven paces towards the four cardinal points. He lifts the flute to his mouth and, at once, all creatures are enchanted and every woman in the sacred park is talking about him. A swarm of bees plays round the cassia in his hair, while the peacocks spread their tails and dance before him, and the gazelles follow in his footsteps, forgetting their midday shade. They listen with closed eyes to the music, or weep with silent tears. It is the pastoral dance, or *rāsa*, danced with the milkmaids. He seizes them and clasps them in his arms, passing his hand over their hands, through their hair and over their knees, leaving the marks of his nails like the pressing of an almond upon them, and draws them into the dance. And, as suddenly, like the clang of a note, he has gone into the burning air, upon the intoxication of the music, leaving them breathless and alone.

This valley of the halcyon is nothing but a park or pleasure ground. The leaves and fruit lie ripe for the halcyon beak. Below the leaves it is a world enriched beyond all experience as to birds and animals. Lion and elephant, tiger and camel tread the plain, while monkeys and parrots move in a world of their own among the branches. There are fruits and nuts we have never seen, aloft, or thrown down from the boughs, and many flowers, held in the hand, or alive within the hair. Here, among the streams, the pagoda, in pristine state and unadorned with eaves, is a shrine or place of rest for the god. It is his pavilion against the heat; while the great halls, for banquet and assembly, hold the Indian multitude. The caves are carved far into the hillside: but the skill of the painter has opened the walls into an ambience of light. This is our purpose, also, and, in order to effect it, we have carried this art of Ajanta bodily from the plains into the shadow of the snows of Nepal, to Magadha, where the *bodhisattva* set up his retreat. These paintings of Ajanta form the only portrayal, in art of the first order, of the

## INDIANS OF AJANTA

dark-skinned races drawn by their own hands; so that it is irresistible to impute their qualities to other works which have perished centuries ago, leaving no trace of their beauties behind them. It is the more certain that they existed in a site so much nearer to the origin and strength of their creed, and from which all their sources of design were derived. This classical or poetic India is found in the frescoes of Ajanta to be progenitor of every myth or fancy which has ever attached to that name. But the revelation is accomplished in an unexpected and transcendental technique of which there is no warning or evidence to be found elsewhere. It does not, that is to say, come outside the canons to which our western eyes are accustomed, being, perhaps, the one exception in all oriental art to this universal rule of difference and dissension. But, though it need not be studied in the acceptance of any new convention, the world that it depicts is of a strangeness that has no parallel. More even than the animals and flowers, it is subtlety and philosophic calm, or innocence, as expressed in every movement and repose of the human figure. It is the delineation of this mood of calmness that gives the character to this unprecedented art. The world that it portrays is exotic, not in the manner of its presentation, but in cold fact, drawn clearly before the eyes. One aspect of this finds an easy parallel in any mental image that we may have formed of the Indians of Central or South America, before their conquest and extermination, for their plumed raiment and insignia of feathers, forming the body or character of their exoticism, is matched with the flowers twined into the hair, or worn in garlands at the waist or wrists. As much as feathers make those mock Indians of the Americas, so do the Indians of Ajanta take their character from mitres of jasmine or the flower of cassia at their ears. It is necessary to combine all the attributes and details of this forgotten world into a convincing entity, into one episode containing all their features. Nor is the banqueting scene, which is our theme, so fanciful as it might be supposed, for the finest fresco in all the caves of Ajanta has for its subject a ban-

## TOWERS OF JASMINE

quieting scene. It was formerly called the banquet of Persians and was supposed to represent the feast of Khosru Parviz, King of Persia.<sup>1</sup> Later research has established its true subject as the banquet of the god Pāñchika; but, none the less, the fresco in question contains many Iranian figures, to be distinguished by their features and dress, so that it does really portray the meeting of the Aryan and the Indian world. The clash of those two conflicting principles and the greater strangeness of that one of them which is less familiar to our eyes, its peculiarities made still more manifest by contrast, provide us with the excuse for which we have been searching and we need delay no more from the shuddering of the sistrum and the feast announced.

First of all, it is necessary for our senses to crawl like bees into the flower heart. We must have the scent of all the blossoms in our nostrils. In the darkness, until the torches come, there are flowers close to the eyes. They are cupped in a hand, held close by the tendril fingers; or, below a mitre or tiara of jasmine, the features of the *bodhisattva* smile benignantly, with inward peace. His neck comes forward, jutting like the neck of a bird, in the static movements of the Indian dance. This nodding or hieratic movement has the majesty of the ancient gods. It is in sign of contentment and of blessing, the flowing forth of his wisdom. There is hypnotic effect in the changed but fixed focus of the eyes with which it is necessary to look upon his perpetual and mysterious smile; it never relaxes and is not the smile of unconstrained happiness. It resembles more the fixed smile of a dancer, his set expression while he performs some difficult feat; it is in sign of his inward concentration. These nodding heads, or towers, look down from every direction out of the darkness, and it is as if each one of them should have a swarm of bees hovering upon its flowers. They are towers or hives stored up with jasmine.

But, soon, other figures emerge from the darkness. Their

<sup>1</sup>Cave I. *The Banquet of the Persians* was reproduced in the Japanese Review the *Kokka*, No. 342, for November 1918.

## DIVINE AND PROFANE LOVE

meaning is more easily seen when they are in little and can be taken in at a glance. There are sirens, with a fish tail and the head of a buffalo; and cupids, or little genii, inciting cocks and kids to fight. Young elephant calves, as graceful as children, play beneath the trees or upon the palace steps.

Near by, or never far away, are pairs of lovers. The lavish spectacle of Nature is not enough without their presence; and perhaps this, more than anything else, marks the difference between their sense of a religious atmosphere and our own. For it is in these pairs of figures that their art has reached to its highest consummation. A sacred or hieratic languor is shed from them; and their emotion, which is more spiritual than animal, finds sensual expression, but in an innocence that is of such refinement, and so naturally and innately distant from vulgarity, that it assumes sacred significance and is as appropriate to its purpose as the saints or martyrs of another faith. It is certain, at least, that the spiritual content of these earthly emotions has never been depicted in such aethereal beauty. Even now, crumbling into dust, their eternal youth still lives upon the walls, quickening the heartbeat with the apprehension of those delights. By magical subtlety of the painter, whose heart must have throbbed in sympathy with their emotion, all the dross of sentiment has been dropped from them and they have emerged into perennial and idyllic youth. Their dalliance has been merged into the principle of benevolence and wise innocence that informs all the paintings of this holy place. Those long-dead lovers, in whose traits of feature there are the proofs of portraiture, have become a part of the living organism disseminated into this darkness of fifteen centuries. The caves of Ajanta, that are black with age and filthy with bats, that are as empty of all else as if they were a desecrated tomb, have this signature of Nature in its purity upon their walls defying time until the plaster falls. In every one of these amatory scenes the lover is a reflection of the prince or god, not a direct portrait but a reminiscence or variation upon his features; while the painter's models, for the other part, were

## DIVINE AND PROFANE LOVE

princesses or *gopīs* of the harem, temple ballerinas and sacred courtesans. Their hieratic immobility of expression has resulted in a corporeal rather than a facial portraiture, as if the dancers were to be recognized in their personality of gesture rather than in the monotony of their masklike faces. But their singularity as works of art lies not in this but in the incredible delicacy with which their attitudes are rendered. The turns of the head, looking towards or shyly away from their lover, the subtle nuances of their hands, such traits of gesture are shown as nowhere else in art upon these mouldering walls. Those nude figures, naked but for flowers or pearls, sit lightly, with drawn-up knees, upon the ground. The youthful, but darker, *bodhisattva* holds her in his embrace; but his hands scarcely touch upon hers and her downstretched arm, reaching down in order to steady her balance, for she has no support and does not lean upon her lover, shows even the reflexing of her elbow, with its outward and double-jointed curvature, a subtlety of observation which helps to distil the flowerlike and gentle atmosphere of this scene. Also, the painter of those frescoes had the power to dispose of his figures in absolute disregard of any difficulty in the angle at which they had to be seen. They have complete liberty in space and are as easily visible in any attitude as a piece of sculpture that can be raised on to a pedestal and turned about in every direction. It is even conceivable from his ease and freedom that the painter may have had the power of drawing with both hands. This would be no improbability where the rigours of Indian self-discipline are involved, and it provides, perhaps, the most plausible explanation to the transcendental qualities in this art. In the free placing and disposition of its figures it has never been approached; and it is the possession of this technique, which is so far removed from *naïveté* or effects of accident and chance, that makes possible this achievement of innocence, creating a spiritual paradise that is ineffable and unique.

It is presented, moreover, with classical purity of detail. The water jars, or amphorae, are of Hellenic elegance and simplic-

## THE ELEPHANT

ity; while the stringed instruments are lutes of the Renaissance, showing in their shapes, as did those, the world of poetry to which they were accompaniment. There are, besides, drums, in variety, to be beaten alternately by knee, hand, heel and elbow, flutes and cymbals, warlike trumpets and the marine conch.

The architecture is as a trellis of light pavilions, airy and cool, no more solid than the castles upon the elephant's back. There are, indeed, a combat of elephants, and a whole herd of elephants playing round their king. In another scene the young prince, or *bodhisattva*, rides out from his palace in a high castle, or howdah, while the crowd prostrate themselves in homage. This oddest of all animals is natural and not incongruous to the scene, being, in fact, the essential image of Indian luxuriance and redundancy. It is, somehow, the corollary to their jewels; and beside the profuse flowers that Nature has hung upon the trees or floated in the lily pool the elephant has become their symbol for gracefulness, baby elephants are the cupids or *amorini* of their imagery, and no physical comparison is flattering that does not embody some allusion to that docile wisdom and economy of strength.

There are numerous instances of this to be found in their elaborate code of ritual gestures, forming a language of the hands in the light of which every painting or statue conveys some special and esoteric meaning. One movement, in particular, in which the hand droops to and fro, or is half raised upon the outstretched arm, is imitated from an elephant's trunk swaying upon the air. But the interpretation of their ritual gestures, in which this one analogy alone might be multiplied a score of times, could form the subject of a whole literature in itself. The oriental mind recognizes its dear intricacies in such subtle semitones of meaning. But, in this torchlight that is dashed for a moment only against their bodies and upon the flowers, there is but time to listen, as it were, to the intonation of this gentle language and to apprehend its motives of meditation and repose. There are sleeping hands, and hands shaking the little

## CONCEPTS OF LIFE AND DEATH

drum; fingers that hold flowers, that point down to the earth in blessing, or extend in generosity as if to allay fear. The later and many-limbed demonology has not yet laid its hundred hands upon the purity of Indian art. These paintings, which date from the seventh century of our era, and were created some twelve centuries after the time of Buddha, still show the crystalline calm of that faith, uncontaminated and unspoilt. But their unique efflorescence is not so singular as existing circumstances would have us believe. They are not the solitary paragon but the sole surviving example—save for two other places,<sup>1</sup> where both the site and the painted decoration are upon a much smaller scale—of an art that must have flourished more especially in the north where tradition was stronger and more pure. We have to recreate the legendary beauties of vanished Nalanda or Magadha in the light of what is left to us of the paintings of Ajanta. Even so, it is life itself, rather than the paintings, that we would see.

That philosophy of peace and calm, in its effect upon living people, must be imagined out of the evidence of this crumbling plaster. For those paintings are the work of acute and pains-taking observation. This is no world of imaginary improbability. The mass of detail drawn directly from Nature is proof of that and, also, they are clearly an instance in which traditions, that were already a thousand years old, have been strengthened and given contemporary application. Coming at the end of the golden age of Buddhism they epitomize all that it achieved in the soothing of life in preparation for death, a negation, which they conceived to be the supreme purpose in having once lived. An unsuccessful death entailed the penalty of being born again. And yet, having said this, nowhere are the symbols of life dwelt upon with more loving delight. No prisoner, behind stone walls, could linger more sorrowfully upon vanished youth. These are the bodies of the painter's friends and loves; but yet, in spite of this tenderness of regret, the

<sup>1</sup>The grottoes of Bagh, in Gwalior, and the citadel of Sigiriya, in Ceylon. A recent Italian expedition has discovered similar frescoes in Western Tibet.

## CONCEPTS OF LIFE AND DEATH

scenes have a present immediacy. They are lived directly and before his eyes, and all the intervening centuries cannot impede their attack in a like manner upon ourselves. For a moment, while we look at them, contemporary time is held still and motionless. Their paradisiacal days extend into the time that beholds them. It is certain that they must celebrate some experience of more fervency than the ambition for mere annihilation. In this, they are, indeed, the denial of their own tenets; and perhaps the same paganism lightens their religion that disperses the sorrows of another faith, once it has escaped from its rigours of belief. Those who can appreciate this when it occurs in Italian painting will recognize its presence, here in Ajanta, and, by analogy of that, will be led to expect it at more ancient Magadha.

This banquet, which is no more than the contact or communion of souls, is, as we have said, a meal without food; and it is continued under every tree, upon the steps above the river, or in the banqueting hall, wherever the symposium can be held. The scene against which it is played is where human life attained to its deepest purity of ideal, accomplishing an outward transformation that was equivalent to the harmony within. The effect of this was not only towards an improvement in physique, but it retained the primitive and unspoilt simplicity of the race. It must have been a soil more receptive of these spiritual fantasies for it is certain that they flourished to improbable lengths and that a state of exaltation was achieved to which there is no parallel in the bloodthirsty polemics or profitless asceticism of other faiths. The flower of this is gathered and given to us in these transcendental paintings, and we have to imagine those centuries of which this was the culmination in the exalted condition of the spirit that could give birth to these legends.

It is, at the beginning, a darkness in which nothing can be seen but the head of the *bodhisattva*. His hair is raised into a high tower, or tiara, and is so entwined with flowers that it is the symbol of Nature, the mitre of its shape suggesting that it is



## THE BLUE BODHISATTVA

a honey-hive for a swarm of bees, or even, in this darkness, night and the stars. This Indian prolixity becomes more apparent, still, when the torchlight reaches to his fingers. They hold a blue lotus, ineffably, and in a gesture forgiving and condoning the world. His necklace of pearls, the stretched bow of his eyebrows that join and have no interval, the line at which his diadem touches upon his forehead, there is a rhythm and an entity in these things that is in harmony with the pose or gesture of the god's body, holding the blue lotus and, himself, blue in hue, of hieratic colour and rubbed with dust of sandalwood. This is the genius of the cave; but his gift of calmness and his access to all knowledge open the walls into the daylight of authentic experience. It is no longer a work of art but the tasting of that life itself.

The conch shell, blown loud and long, brings word that it is morning. There is mist in the leaves and a low light in the sky. That voice of the Triton sounds again and again, and before the dumbing of those salt sea lips, before the throat of shell is silent, fire runs across the sky, up into the zenith, and to the far end of night. At once, and in a moment, it is morning.

Already, even at this hour of the newborn day, their hands are picking flowers, while dew is dropping from the jasmine and the cassia, from the rose-apple tree and the red and waxy *kanaka*. The flowers make their raiment, shaken from the leaves. The plentiful anthropomorphic legend strengthens into a hundred shadows of clove or saffron that breathe the morning. O how they walk! Not hurrying, but as animals in pride of carriage, close to their sister animals, as the gazelle or antelope, and the men like young lions in tread. The red walls of the abbey rise in front, and its towers climb into the air as though they were the tops of hills. There is even an observatory from which to watch the clouds and make calculations from the stars. There is a water clock, and deep translucent ponds for bathing, or for lilies. The cloisters are endless and the courts of many floors. The storeys have dragon projections and coloured

## MORNING

eaves, and the pearl-red pillars, carved and ornamented, and the roofs covered with tiles that reflect the light in a thousand shades—these things make the beauty of the scene. All round lies the park or pleasure ground, with little streams and the chiming voices of the river. At intervals, the high champak tree stoops down and breathes scent upon the sacred air, or the mangroves spread over all their shade and cool the burning waters.

Pilgrims came to this sacred spot from as far away as China, braving the terrors of a year's journey, or more, through the winds of the Koko Nor and over the Himalayan passes. We have the account of Hsiouen-Thsang, a Chinese priest who came here on pilgrimage in the seventh century of our era and spent two years in the abbey.<sup>1</sup> It was one of the holy places of the world. But we must dematerialize its details and the exactness of its chronology in order to create the illusion that it is present and standing before our eyes. This must be the sublimation of its many centuries of existence. The red walls, as the Chinese pilgrim saw them, are age-old. Within their enclosure we have to imagine the fusion of the pleasure ground or paradise in which the *bodhisattva* set up his retreat with the amenities of this abbey built in celebration of those legends of the flowery land. Morning may come in with the rumbling of a sea conch, blown to awaken the monks, but, also, it may be a solitude without those drones to live in it, returned to its pristine wildness as when the *bodhisattva* chose it out for this, and his attendants, earthly and celestial, dwelt in the caves and inhabited the emptiness.

Now that it is loud daylight, the figures that move through this incandescence carry, inevitably, a water jar or are abroad upon their work at some task or other. Their weight of burden tells more than ever of their grace of carriage. For they walk with ease and freedom but in control of every balance of the

<sup>1</sup>A few lines in the preceding paragraph are taken from his description of the Abbey of Nalanda.

## INTERIOR SCENE

body, going barefoot like wild animals but risen erect from primaeval earth into the airs of knowledge while nothing is lost to them of animal suppleness or strength. They are little in stature but their long backs exaggerate their height, held straight from the heavy load upon their heads, and walking, without that, in thought that it is there. This is the stirring of the morning.

Inside the King's palace the princesses are moving in cloud-like and flimsy garments, transparencies thin as mist, not clinging to the body but falling in their own outline to the ankles as if filled with breath or hemmed with little weights. The stiffness of this gauze allows of no folds. It falls with never a tremor to the ground and is so soft that its texture is only coolness and not heat, for there is air between the muslin and the body. These dresses, worn for their cool vacuum, are the pathos of the palace courts because of the youth of their wearers, infant princesses given in marriage long ago, and because of the manner in which their skins of coffee or of clove are thrown into further darkness by this unsubstantial pallor. But they are so many in number that the little children have elder sisters in plenty, and the pathos is no longer there at maturity of youth, with the grown *gopīs*. Nor must we exaggerate the whiteness of those dresses. They are only as pale as that where the two widths of the material come together and, apart from that, are airy transparencies, interposing coolness.

The prince is the *bodhisattva*, undeified. His hair is crowned, but not mitred, with flowers. The locks are dressed over one another in curls, with autocratic care. He has woken in a light and airy pavilion, lotus pillared, with a *gopī* on his lap; but the tempting of this handsome youth does not proceed apace, for his alternation into Krishna, his other deification in the Hindu pantheon, has to wait upon his mood.<sup>1</sup> This theme of redemp-

<sup>1</sup>By tradition, Buddha was the son of King Suddhodana and Queen Māya, who reigned at Kapilavastu, on the borders of Nepal. Krishna was also of kingly family, being born of the royal house of the Yādavas, who reigned at Mathurā on the Jumna.

## BUDDHA AND KRISHNA

tion by the self-sacrifice of a youth of kingly birth has, for alternative, the spectacle of Krishna enjoying all the pleasures of the terrestrial world, a form of godhead not incomprehensible in the luxuriance of the Indian heat. Here, where the airs are tempered with snow, the coolness calls for meditation. Yet, these princesses are none other than the *gopīs*, milkmaids and sacred ballerinas, with whom Krishna trod the fiery measures of the *rāsa*, or pastoral dance. At the same time they are, in a sense, nuns of the convent, or priestesses, at least. They are in number as white doves upon the paved courts and in the cloisters. In fact, the red walls of the abbey enclose a king's palace, a nunnery, and a pleasure park.

The reception of all spiritual ideas and their slow culture into flower is the point and purpose of this holy place, where again, by easy transition, the carnal world is assembled and put to experience. The twin streams of Indian thought, its prolixity and its restraint, spring from identical sources in this same area, and, in the beginning, their waters flow side by side. The differences in Buddhism and Brahmanism, the respective incarnations of the *bodhisattva* and of Krishna, have little to distinguish them in the early stages of their legends. It is only as they move into contrary directions of purity and fecundity that the two philosophies separate and flow apart for ever. They can be compared, therefore, to the changes of mood in this one young prince. He is hero, as it were, of both legends; but, in the one, he turns away from earthly things into contemplation, and, in the other, he takes all the fruits of the earth and is, himself, tempter as much as tempted. That favourite scene in which Krishna sports with the milkmaids is the same story, but with a different ending, to the occasion on which the Buddha was sent by his father, in order to wean him from his asceticism, into the park filled with dancing girls, who had been given orders to exert all their charms upon him—but in vain. The nuns who, at the next phase, are sacred prostitutes, are common to both stories and in such hieratic implications their innocence is unimpaired. When

## THE INDIAN PAGODA

they are not symbols of purity their purpose in the story is most easily described as the tribute of earthly beings to the celestial gods, and its acceptance is the proof of divine interest. If it is refused, different, but not necessarily higher, things are expected of the deity. It shows no more than the direction of the divine spirit and not its division into categories of right and wrong. Those implications will not be understood, for their import has not yet dawned upon this world of innocence.

The fountain of these imperishable legends, flowing down along the sacred rivers, springs or wells up among the water courts of this abbey. Somewhere—and why not here?—close to the Himalayan watershed, all the prolixity of Indian legend had its source and half the world came to obey one or other of the Indian faiths. Here, then, is the Indian pagoda, primitive and unadorned. This is the beginning. The palanquin and the peacock fan had their origin along these banks of water. The castle upon the elephant's back and the tree of pearls found their reflection in the lily pool. The pagoda grew apace and stood in great stature in the crowded south, in tier after tier, or like a stone waggon halted.<sup>1</sup> For greater labour they would hew a whole temple from the hillside, in place of building it.<sup>2</sup> Pillars of stone, faceted like diamonds of Golconda, glitter in the darkened light. A porch of monoliths, carved into rearing horses, rein back their towering and petrified strength upon their haunches, and cannot relinquish the frenzy of their pose.<sup>3</sup>

Such effects of strain are very far removed from the simplicities of Magadha, that pastoral and bucolic kingdom. Here, there is no more than the hint of them, as if deep down in the waters, an echo or an image given back from far. These are the remote depths, not even always to be seen, but only at moments of absolute stillness, as a glimpse into the future.

Perhaps these unrealities of the water would show us, also,

<sup>1</sup>The Black Pagoda, at Kanakak.

<sup>2</sup>The Kailāsa of Ellora.

<sup>3</sup> Vellor, near Koimbatour

## THE BANKS OF GANGES

the banks of the river lined with steps and lit by a hundred fires. The red, or ochreous pagodas lift their corrupted spires into the smoke-tainted air; or are golden, like brass, out of the smoke cloud. Within them lurk the many-limbed gods, with eyes of ruby, all semblance lost to human or divine.<sup>1</sup> The streets that are narrow and teeming with loincloths are made impassable by the sacred cow, that stares and ruminates and none dares to move her.

But the Ganges, flowing down to eternity, is cynosure of all the town. The pagodas touch one another upon its banks; high steps of stone, like tiers of an amphitheatre and meant for the massing of a multitude, lead down into the water. Devotees, like swarming ants, are alive upon the steps, unclothing themselves for bathing and to drink the sacred current. Their every gesture is in fury of exaltation; while, among them, ascetics painted with chalk and ashes, in smooth leprousness as if evil to the touch, surpass the others in frenzy of movement, or sit immobile and horrid: their wasted limbs, lime white, crossed or folded into hieratic poses: their death's heads, expressionless, but grinning all the same. And round them into the crowd dart their little, evil acolytes bearing the begging bowl, an obscene cooking pot marked with ashes and smeared with the smoke of food. The massed weight of these perpetual crowds, or the sliding mud, mere alluvial slime and mucus of the river plain, has caused the stone steps to sink and topple so that they appear to possess much more than their authentic antiquity and are as if riven and shattered by an earthquake.

There are stone stairs among them that, instead of descending into the river, end in a terrace, or quay, upon the water. They are the burning *ghats* upon which wooden stages are set for cremation. Dead bodies, wrapped in cloths of red or white, can be seen waiting their turn. They lie with their feet in the Ganges ready to be burned. At all hours the air is acrid with smoke, for

<sup>1</sup>The temple of Ganesh at Benares has an idol which has three eyes, is painted red, and has a silver scalp and an elephant's trunk covered with a bib.

## THE BURNING GHATS

the offering of burnt flesh never ceases and old and young send up their smoke to heaven with no difference in the innocent or the corrupted. When their destruction is but half achieved the burden of those wooden trestles is taken up and thrown upon the river to flow down with the current and taint the waters, so that this one of the great rivers of the world presents the appearance of a battlefield or a charnel house.

Perhaps cremation was only carried to its end of dust and ashes if it was an instance of *suttee*, when a rich man died and all his women must accompany him through the purgatory of fire. On occasions without number it will have been immolation upon an immense scale. With a sort of stupefaction, the old and haggard and the young and beautiful would suffer themselves to be bound upon the pyre, and it was only when the flames reached to them and it was too late that they broke into shrill screams. Sometimes the fire burned through the bonds that held them, leaving them free to attempt their escape through the flames; but we are told that it was always the young and never the old who tried to take advantage of this last chance of living. Upon which the spectators would thrust them back into the flame and throw more faggots upon the fire. A holocaust of this description must have taken hours to accomplish its purpose. Every woman who married a high-caste Hindu, but this was often done by proxy and before they were old enough to walk, came, at least, to maturity, in the knowledge that this would be her certain fate. This was the prospect; and there was scarcely ever an alternative. How it came to be regarded as an obligation to put an end to your life in this agonizing way is one of the major mysteries of social history and one of the most cruel delusions in all that chronicle of deception.

So we see that these dread platforms, or *ghats*, groaned with living as well as with the lifeless dead, and that the smoke of sacrifice hung continually upon the air. The fire of little flames and smouldering embers glowed for as far as the eyes could see

## CREMATION OF THE LIVING

in every direction up and down the sacred river. At night, this whole scene should have been one immense cauldron burning up into heaven and lighting the sky like some vast conflagration; but, by irony of fate that might have shewed to them this pointlessness in suffering, in that darkness there was no drama of the lights. The illumination of that agony went for nothing. It was no more than a slow fire tended by the watchman. Even the other flames were no more than lamps or little nightlights hung upon the temples. As for that greater pyre, slowly, slowly, they were sifted into ashes. The sky was not lit by this, and there were no signs or portents. All that pain was useless and in vain. Yet immemorial custom, hardened into rule, prescribed it, and for many centuries it was universally enjoined. A pardon extended posthumously by the dead person in order to spare his relatives does not appear even to have been considered by them. It was their only means of entrance into paradise and tradition and expediency decreed that they should submit to it. We see, therefore, those river banks lit now and again, over many centuries, with the living pyre and never failing in this tribute. One of the cruellest of all hoaxes was perpetrated upon them, without even the excuse of retaliation or revenge. There was no reason why they should have suffered. Yet the living must accompany the dead, through regions where the dead were not pained, and this merciless atrocity is greatest of all the horrors that pertain to that writhing and many-limbed pantheon, the Hindu arcana and its castes and legends.

Of all of these, at the early period of which we are treating, there was the portent, though not yet, perhaps, the strict observance. But this is the swarming of the Indian plain, while our concern is with the pure air of the hills. For as far as the snow was in sight, along the foothills of the Himalayas, this school of reason and repose found its converts. There were great abbeys and caves that were sacred grottoes. Down in the plain this faith never flourished; it spread to great dimensions; and, as quickly, faded. The fecund, polytheistic legends of the Hindus



## THE ABBEY OF MAGADHA

reigned in its stead, forming, as it were, a kind of psycho-sexual vapour or mist given off by the teeming millions of the population. The spread of Buddhism, except to Ceylon, an island fastness where it could flourish undisturbed in the empty seas, had the crossing of the Himalayas as an indispensable part of its rigours of initiation. In later centuries, when the Bay of Bengal became an Indian Mediterranean, and the dying fire of Buddhism was carried from India to Java and to the kingdom of the Khmers, when Borobudur and the temples of Angkor were built, the journey to those distant places from these far-off schools of peace and repose under the mountains may have been as arduous and inspiring as the climb out of one world and descent into another that awaited the pilgrim from China who came to see the sacred places of India.

In fact, India, or this true phase of it, continued to exist after its mother-body was dead. The farther India, of China and Cambodia and Java, proceeded to the strict cultivation of those principles when their observance was failing in the land of their origin. The point of these remarks is that it will be within reason to see the courts of Magadha thronged with the men of distant countries. The ascetics of China who, often, cannot have survived the horrors of the double journey, will tread the long cloisters of the convent and think to emulate its architecture, its red walls and high tower of bells, if they live to return to their native land. They were to make their country for some four or five centuries into no less than the spiritual dependency of India. They had come here in order to find the seeds or germs of this transplantation.

And at their side are the emissaries of Khosru Parviz the Persian, and the Greek ambassador, Megasthenes, or his prototypes from Bactria. There is news of the two Romes of East and West, seen distantly, as it were, through the ambassadors of Khosru Parviz the Sassanid. This chronicle is the dissemination, in one moment of time, of the accumulated knowledge that must have come to Magadha during the thousand years of

## THE ABBEY OF MAGADHA

its existence as an abbey. News, coming out of these different directions, from the four cardinal points of the world, will have knocked, once in a lifetime, perhaps, upon the wooden gates of the abbey. They must, even, have received accounts in full measure of events upon the Galilean shore and have been not uninfluenced in their own ritual by the strange superstructure raised upon those doctrines of simplicity by the Jewish superstition, or Greek complication, of his disciples. During the millennium of its life all those things will have come to this remote place, living, ever, in the perpetual peace of its red walls. The world to East and West of it communicated its ideas and received back, in exchange, its gifts of control and contemplation. And this could be true of no place in the Western World, for nothing lay beyond that finality of ocean; and even to accomplish its distant ends the journey could be measured in miles where the other lay in leagues. This watershed of the Aryan, the Indian and the Mongolian worlds is the most fitting place for a concatenation of those far different principles. And it is the watershed of religions, as well as the dividing place of races, and the centre or bony framework of the whole world.

It is, then, at no certain or defined time during that long existence that we place this banquet or symposium within the high walls and pleasure park of this abbey. It begins more vaguely with the arrival of the Persian or Iranian contingent, wearing the high peaked caps of fur or lambs' wool that have come down in history from the lion hunts of Tiglath Pileser or Asshurbanipal. Yet, this is their Aryan aping of the Semitic Kings of Babylon or Susa. There was ever a great King of the Persians; and whether his capital was Susa, or Babylon, or Ecbatana, or whether he reigned among the thousand columns of Persepolis, the style and something of the appearance of this satrap of satraps, autocrat of autocrats, remained unaltered and unchanged. His fullness of beard, and his scimitarlike curve of nose are true of every manifestation of his type. The style of it was not even altered from the reign of Cyrus at Persepolis to

## ARRIVAL OF THE PERSIANS

the rule of Shah Abbas at Isfahan; or carrying it down even later, and almost to within living memory, to the waist-length beard and voice of sounding metal of Fath Ali Shah. These externalities were ever the same. This was the rich man of the East; all the wealth of the land poured into his coffers. There was no rich noble to rival with him; and, indiscriminately, he attacked and exterminated the would-be wealthy among his own subjects and those who were ambitious among his own brothers and sons. These things, a great change of religion, the imposition of the rule of Islam, has been powerless to alter; or that was almost expressly designed to preserve its continuance. The germ of their ideas remained ever the same; and so have the instincts of the Persian arts, which built in coloured tiles, or bricks, at Babylon, and Persepolis and Isfahan.

The arrival upon this scene of the Iranians means, therefore, the coming of a nearly identical embassy, over and over again in history. It will only change, as it were, with the change of fashions, veering nearer to, or further away from, the original invention of its nationality. The spontaneity of that character can only be exaggerated or diminished: nothing will ever alter it in its essentials. The Persians are people of the plain, with the black felt tents of the nomad ever in the background of the picture. Their talent for the carpet is as recurrent a motive in history as the emblematic Celestial with his silkworm and mulberry tree. The spinning of those yellow hands was silk; here it is the dyeing and knotting of wools into bright colours. Their buildings of brick and tile were the carrying of these same inherent characteristics into architecture, in a system of decoration that proceeded, as it were, stitch by stitch over the surface of wall and dome.

It is the Sassanian king, riding in bas relief upon a great stallion along the rock face of a mountain, who has sent this embassy. The great horses in these carvings are ancestors to the *destriers* and *percherons* of our own mediaeval knights in their plate armour. The king wears his long locks oiled and perfumed

## KHOSRU UPON THE FACE

and tied with the royal fillet, beneath that peculiar headgear which was his insignia and prerogative. The brim of this was a crown, like the brim of a jester's cap upon a playing card, and above it floats what appears to be an inflated bladder, distended in the triumph of his pace. Fleeced trousers complete this clown-like image; and the despot engages in this gear, alike, and upon equal terms, with the god who is no more than the diminished image of himself; with the Roman emperor,<sup>1</sup> conquered and prostrate at his horse's feet; and with the lion who stands erect to hurl himself upon the king's spear.

The tilting or tournament pattern derived from these double encounters, in which two beings or two creatures meet in equal majesty, is the motive for all the glorious Sassanian stuffs. The imperial workshops of Byzantium drew their inspiration, thence, for the silk panels, tattered rags of which are preserved in the cathedral treasuries of nearly every country of the West. They are the last glimmer left to us of the glories of that imperial ritual, and they may have served as basis for the peculiarly Gothic invention of heraldry, a sort of poetical game or fantasy, a vastly complicated game of chess, as it were, based upon high birth and martial achievement; while, in a diametrically opposite direction, these Sassanian designs, or their prototypes, found their way as far, even, as Japan, and are to be found, there, in the Shoso-in at Nara. The embassy of the Iranians, as portrayed in the frescoes of Ajanta, will have brought some of these Persian stuffs as gifts, and in more hallowed centres of the Buddhist faith, in sites consecrated and made holy by the actual presence of the *bodhisattva* in his lifetime, their presence is more certain still. No embassy of Khosru Parviz, as no banquet of the Persians, could have been properly depicted in their absence. If pilgrims from distant China came to Magadha and have left us their written descriptions of its splendours, so did the emissaries of Khosru Parviz, the Great King, penetrate to these sacred valleys, and the proof of it is in this fresco. The echoes

<sup>1</sup>Valentinian.

## OF THE MOUNTAIN

of the Roman *triclinium*, for the Persian King feasted in Roman manner, died away among the Himalayan vales; here did the rattle of their countless dishes of silver and gold, the sound of their glass goblets shivered into fragments by a drunken hand, the coarseness of Trimalchio and cruelty of Nero, die away with the bloated images of those ghosts, like a kind of loud and vicious music, a brassy and blatant farce. The feast of Khosru Parviz, or it is the banquet of the god Pānchika, has these echoes, to be sure; no louder, perhaps, than the distant shouting of the Roman circus, but as true of the cosmopolis, the one town that ruled the world, with its workless millions fed with free corn, sated in the luxury of the Roman baths and gorged on the blood of the Roman games with their tridents, trumpets and the sign of death, shown with no mercy from a myriad hands.

Roman memories make the first course. The murrhine vases and the Campanian wines; dishes of ripe figs heaped high with snows of Etna; nightingales' tongues that were no larger than a live nerve and like a thread of fire; fatted dormice; tented ceilings, painted with clouds, that fell in rose petals; Gaditanian dancers, with castanets; such rumours of the Roman orgy died long after. Nothing, be it remarked, was noble in this. Its massed riches were an aristocracy of wealth, not of breeding. The echoes of their dissipation, when the Romans feasted upon the fruits of the world, lingered in the minds of all the barbarian races who were their neighbours. But even the Persians, who were more temperate, were not averse to wine, so that this feast, or the banquet of the god, is ruled by Roman usage. They recline at the feast.

The reverberation of that Roman orgy rings upon the walls. The Romans had gone down before the barbarians. Their upstart excellence had diminished and now their wickedness was punished. It was another Sedan, but multiplied, over years, into many holocausts. The Persians, in comparison with them, had an antiquity of millenniums. Also, the Romans had contributed

## THE BANQUET

nothing to religious theory; their material minds were incapable of such tenuous developments. They were practical, unimaginative moderns, in a marble setting that was their counterpart, fabulous through its expense, and of unbelievable thoroughness in execution.

The Persians, by contrast, were seekers after the soul, and their country was pre-eminently the land of the Magi, or wise men. Followers of Zoroaster and of Mithras were of their number; while, as a race, they had a leaning towards theological speculation which was quite alien to the Roman temperament with its genius for roadmaking and lawgiving. The Oriental in the Persian was more prone to casuistry. Even so, their arrival at this distant court is more a subject for curiosity at their strange manners and the sumptuousness of their dress than for any appeal of superior wisdom in their philosophy. Nor is their participation in the banquet anything better than a Roman grossness in the eyes of the Indians. When the Persian King lifts his cup of rhinoceros horn to his lips it is as a terrestrial god, no better than the goat gods or satyrs of the vineyards. With unsteady hand he spills wine from the cup so that *archon*, the ancient wine of Shiraz, runs out over his beard. His thick speech betrays him.

In fact, one half of the banqueting hall eats and drinks. But their numbers are interlarded with their own ascetics. The anchorites of the Eastern Church, like satyrs of the Nitrian desert, all hair and filth, mutter their prayers that are like imprecations, and hold themselves aloof. We may even place at their board the spiritual athletes of a later race, the Slavs, seeing them as Archbishop Macarius saw them, in the seventeenth century at Moscow, which he terms the Third Rome, feasting in the Kremlin. The naked anchorites of the North, covered with long hair, had been summoned from the forests and the frozen tundras to give political or religious advice to the Czar. Their gaunt appearance struck terror into his soul and the Archbishop well describes the anomaly of their presence at the banqueting table by the side of the fur-clad boyars. These ghosts of the Arctic

## ANCHORITES OF THE ARCTIC

winds, all of great height, we impute in virtue of strangeness to this Indian vale. By extremity of mortification they have their place in this midst, but it is only their own personal salvation that is their concern. A religion that permits of this gross egoism in its practice is proved, also, in their art, which impresses holiness by images of terror, breaking the canon of proportion in order to attain commanding height. Stiffness and inflexibility are their excuse of majesty, gauntness their rule of beauty, and hollow cheeks their satisfaction of holiness.

In distinction to this, before it grew otiose in the heat, the lore of this Indian vale is unselfish and teaches sweetness. The *bodhisattva*, who is redeemed, himself, stays upon earth until the salvation of all men is assured; but this redemption is into nothingness. It gives no concrete promises, but only peace. Dreamless sleep, without that warmth of safety in waking, is its prize. It is not sleep, indeed, but annihilation. The smile of this beckons from every feature of the *bodhisattva*. He has experienced oblivion and the sweet taste of it is on his lips. He is in the trance of its security and forgetfulness. This is his message to the world. It is ineffable, because absolute, wisdom that he has attained, at the price of physical and spiritual control. The treasure which is contained by everyone within himself, is the golden discovery of this valley.

If other faiths rendered millions unhappy through fear of condign punishment or agony of repentance it is reasonable to suppose that the spread of this interior wisdom made the illumination of countless millions of drab lives. This same smile of inward peace was of universal dispensation. It beckons the human soul to the contemplation of itself; and still smiles, and is still ambiguous and enigmatic, being the known and recognizable flickering of the truth but not the absolute statement of its ends. It encourages and does not tell everything. It is not the smile of a person who has woken up from sleeping; but its expression of anaesthesia, for the Orientals intoxicate themselves with drugs rather than with strong drink, will have had a par-

## THE SCHOOL OF REPOSE

ticular message to their minds. The smile expresses a sweet dwelling upon sublime experience, not as a memory, but in continual enjoyment of the prize it has won. This mask of peace, of Indian lotus calm, is more curious when it is to be seen coming upon the features of a non-Indian race. The four faces of Buddha upon the towers of Angkor have this double exoticism, for not only are they the mysterious relics of a race that has perished, the ruins of a town that had a million souls, but there is further imposed upon these masks the echoes of this vanished Indian world. And the same remote strangeness is true of the ruins of Buddhist Java, at the far end of the Indian Ocean, near to Amboyna and the isles of sandalwood. It is a fascination to conjecture the missionaries of this faith when these spiritual athletes were yet purified from the Hindu prolixity and its taste for horror. The holy men of India were a familiar sight during many centuries in all those countries that embraced the Buddhist faith; or, at least, they were so much a part of tradition and experience that none would fail to know them for what they were. It is probable that some of the strangest types, physically and mentally, that have ever occurred in the history of religion travelled as proselytes of the faith into these distant lands, and it is certain that their outward appearance will have been the corollary to the inward message that they had to bring. The apostles of repose and peace created, in fact, the type of the Chinese sage, who, for his own ends of wisdom, was fixed in his mind upon this Indian vale. His pattern, or original, may have had the unaffected wildness in appearance of one who has no earthly possessions and has travelled so far from home that he has no hope of return. If this was so he tended to become, in the absence of any extraneous aids, outward as well as inward embodiment of Indian sanctity. His poverty in worldly things may have been that of the poorest gypsy, but this mere comparison shows the strength of type that can be played, as it were, upon the bare boards. There was this chief difference, that he was a wanderer, whereas the Chinese sage was essentially of



## THE SCHOOL OF REPOSE

one place, the ancient of his own cavern or plane-tree, and never moving out of that shade. The Indians, in their discovery of the inward powers of concentration, must have been able to shape their own outward physical aspect into harmony with their own inmost intention. The result of this, as it is still to be seen in the Hindu fakirs, is horrible where horror has been the intention, but quite other must have been the effects won by true wisdom and real discipline of the spirit. To this extent it is a fact that everyone contains a paradise within himself, the flowering of which is made more profuse by solitude. It is easy, indeed, to exaggerate these things; but it is no more difficult to admit their possibility. The far-spread rumour of these truths and their translation into actual and living examples, as the faith spread from one land to another bringing peace of mind in its train, is proof of the pristine power it must once have possessed. The happiness and contentment of millions in the Chinese Empire after Buddhism was established, the spread of this in identical circumstances into Japan, and the proof of their conviction afforded us by the stupendous ruins of Angkor where all else of the Khmer Empire has perished, is proof, if any proof is needed, that exceptional and tremendous spiritual forces must be allowed to the valleys in which this school of peace was engendered.

Already, the stuff of its disintegration is there. The waters of those valleys run down to India, where the swarming has begun, where there are superfluous millions. Perhaps the chill of high altitudes is necessary to this peace of mind, for the feverish heat of the great plain begot the many-limbed deities, and the gods who so far forsook their immortality as to take their pleasure in human kind. This expectation fed the priests and kept the sacred prostitutes of the temples. It divided the race into solid rules of caste, out of which no change was possible, decreeing destiny by generations and destroying all ambition. The beauty of its early legends, in a world of licence and fabulous fecundity, where trees and flowers blossom in a night,

## SACRED BALLERINAS

where the god has a hundred hands, and the criterion of beauty and elegance is the elephant, the strange unfamiliarity of this tropical richness must not obscure its venal weaknesses and the abasement of the godhead into a multiplication of human desires and their sensual gratification. These Indian legends contained within themselves the germ of their own decay. The infection was immediate and the crisis could not be long delayed. Once contamination had occurred this incurable fever was the result. The torrid plains allowed no peace of mind. All was turmoil and the whirl of limbs.

Meanwhile, the dancing has begun. The park fills with *bayadères* who come from the temple and pose upon the temple steps. They dance in the banqueting hall and upon the stone flights that lead down into the river, in high mitres of cassia and in chains of flowers. They make use of every seduction in order to tempt the *bodhisattva*.

In the lure of the dance they are swaying like flowers upon their stems; sometimes, with jutting hips, so distending the weight of the body upon one thigh that they achieve duality and are the legs of one dancer, ending at a point where more perfection is impossible and translated to the arms and upper body of another, not broken in the air but joined, now, in a suppleness that is impossible of belief.

Some cling to the *bodhisattva* with their arms around his neck and whisper into his ear; or with swift exposition dance alone before him. Others have climbed into the lower branches of the trees, not higher than where the hands can reach to, and lie along the boughs or dangle, temptingly, to be lifted down.

Upon the steps that lead down into the river they dance to those different levels for the eyes; upon the highest as on a cloud; or descending from the sky, dance upon the middle steps for near and nearer contact; and upon the lowest shelves of all make play of the water, steeping themselves to the waist in that glass, but only in order to be more clearly seen. They are broken at the point of beauty: resumed in that nether world,

## SACRED BALLERINAS

down to its floor of pebbles but climb out while you watch them, upon the brim, in deliberate ravishment to snare the eyes.

They are small and supple, crowned with high diadems, not yet dry, with the water gleaming on their skins. The shedding of this is as the shedding of garments in the dance. And, as quickly, other *gopīs* take their places, climbing out still wet, all, all alike, as sisters. It is a known enticement to be born again coming up out of the water.

This is danced, also, at the fountain brim, and in the lily tank. The lotus is like a fan, or like a feather in the hand. There is music everywhere, played low and soft upon the shuddering drum, while these sisters of the lioness lie hidden, or leap, lion yellow, into the light. They are saffron skinned, or are coffee, or are jasmine; all alike in shape, but with dwindlings of their darkness from clove to pale copper. In the torchlight they are lighter still, or even golden, as they come up from the fountain. Its illumination is as a light held close to their skins. They must be seen stepping out of the water and drying fast before our eyes from the air of many fans. And their rebirth, springing from the fountain foot, takes them among the banqueters.

But the symposium, which has been described as a meal without food, now drops that pretension and with changed philosophy is about to produce its pleasures to the Orient. The returned ambassadors display the presents they have brought. But, first, the phantasmagoria proceeds. This exchange of theories cannot revoke the banquet without, at least, a show of its expectations. Within a short space of time we must prepare the entertainment that is to be played during the feast; and, in the meantime, its fullness of perfection is impossible without some mention of its ancient potentialities. If the episodes of the play are intended to personify things that are strange and remote to this halcyon valley so must their vision of the feast be presented to the inhabitants from a context that is unfamiliar to their minds. This is the only reciprocity of image, that the sharp strangeness should be of mutual experience. Their ignorance

## GOG AND MAGOG

has to be informed through momentary interception of a world that is unfamiliar to them. Without this the symposium would be incomplete, deprived of the clatter of its dishes.

Those Roman banquets of which the echo had come down to them were but the feasting of vulgar parvenus. Their equivalent of the aldermanic banquet, appears, now, through a rent in the curtains.

Oysters, by the hundred dozen, are opened by the knives of skilled operators with rolled-up sleeves and hands that are chapped by the brine. The oyster shrinks and shrivels into itself at the touch of condiments, of the vinegar and pepper, while the empty shells are heaped into great piles, in unconscious parody of those kitchen-middens thrown up by the most primitive race of men, who were too lazy and ignorant to do anything but wander along the shore and live upon the shell-fish cast up by the tide. Next, come silver tureens with turtle soup, spoil of the torpid Sargasso. They eat barons of beef as large as the stumps of trees and fatted capons, the emasculate eunuchs of the barn door. They drink beer in tankards drawn from barrels which have been brought to the door on drays led by huge horses. Or there is port wine, drawn down from the vines of Douro by wide-horned oxen, through the sunlight to the quays and matured for many years in mahogany wood. The mist and steam of their gargantuan feasting hangs like a curtain in the banqueting hall and clings to the rafters. It is a feast of giants, or at least of gigantic stomachs; but no more than this would be understood of it, for the comparison of gargantuan means nothing to ears that are twined with cassia. It is a great eating of meat, and that is all.

But the scene changes to an oval room that is brilliantly lit by candles. All its details are of an exquisite delicacy. The over-doors are modelled with classical reliefs; the wall lights are works of fine sculpture; the ceiling is well painted; even the cornice has been considered and carved by one man. The soft and equable candlelight is shed, nearly shadowless, around the



FESTIN CHEZ LA DUBARRY A LOUVECIENNES  
BY MOREAU LE JEUNE

*Paris: Louvre, Gnaidou photo*



## THE SUPPER AT LOUVECIENNES

room, and blazes in a hundred lights upon the table. This is draped with the finest linen, upon which figures modelled in biscuit porcelain are standing. The service is of fine china, with light blue or yellow ground painted with flowers.

This pavilion or light diningroom is crowded with figures. Pair by pair, they engage in conversation round the table; and, as well, there are guards or a bodyguard in uniforms of blue, or red, and innumerable lacqueys in striped liveries who carry in the dishes and serve the food and wines. A galaxy of wax candles gives forth sparkling refulgence. As to the interior air of the pavilion, it might almost seem to be of gilded water. The vessel of this building, that is so perfectly shaped to receive the light, has no shadows and no hidden corners. It is like a shell formed to fit around the table; and, indeed, in the delicacy of its flutings and articulations, this perfection of little details comes near to those walls of porcelain. The whole of this supper scene is flecked and dashed with the shine of china. The light is dappled upon it in little touches from the individual candles, all burning equally like flecks of gold. This glitter has its echo in the silk of the dresses and from the gold lace of the officers and lacqueys. It is the supper of Louis Quinze in the pavilion at Louveciennes.

The details of this supper of the King are preserved to us in a drawing by Moreau le jeune, who, in his skill, spares us no particulars of the scene.<sup>1</sup> It was one of many suppers; of so numerous a series, in fact, that they must have tended to become all alike and of a pattern, in which case this one evening will have been typical of all. It lives before our eyes in all its vapid elegance, affording us a near view, even though it be in little, of this most bored and dissipated of all beings that have ever drawn breath.

This is the age of pleasure at the climax of its achievement; and, it must be admitted, at the greatest distance that it ever travelled from grossness and ordinary greed. The very courses

<sup>1</sup>It is dated 1771, and belongs to the Louvre.

## THE SUPPER AT LOUVECIENNES

of the supper, it is certain, were designed upon a scheme of delicacy that had no counterpart in other lands. Here, they dined upon champagne and drank the most delicate wines that have ever been made. The courses that they ate had banished the last traces of the mediaeval kitchen. Swans and peacocks and rounds of beef had given place to delicate river trout, fine chickens in a dozen different modes, the favourite chocolate soufflé of the King,<sup>1</sup> and ices and sorbets worthy of 'Le Canamelier français!' These men and women, when they woke late in the morning, did not drink the mediaeval ale of an earlier age but chocolate whipped into a foam, from cups of porcelain.

The King of France, be it remembered, was accustomed to eat his meals in public. For a century and a half this had been one of the sights of Versailles. He was served by the highest dignitaries of the land, while, from behind the ropes, he was watched by foreign visitors to Paris, who have left many descriptions of the ceremony, and by any beggars or hungry wretches who liked to idle away an hour filing with open mouths past the gilded balustrades of his bed and staring with gaping eyes upon his systematized greed. The contrast of these rags and tatters was even remarked upon, and more than one writer has put on record his horror at these spectres of the slums, leering, or looking sullenly upon the scene.

Here, at Louveciennes, there was privacy. Even Louis XIV found it necessary to escape from Versailles to his garden and villa at Marly; while, in his great-grandson Louis XV, the contrast in succeeding generations produced a violent desire to evade public ceremony. Where the aim in life of Louis XIV was to take as much trouble as possible, with Louis XV it had changed into the ambition to avoid any and every public ceremony. Even so, while he was at Versailles, he could not break with tradition. In his person, and in the fourth generation, Louis XV was in outward appearance almost the repeat of

<sup>1</sup>The recipe for this was sent by Louis XV to the Elector of Saxony. It was still served at the State banquets in Dresden until the War.



## PORTRAIT OF LOUIS XV

parallel of Louis XIV, that paragon among kings. This type, or this identical person, was the French monarchy for two centuries, from the accession of Louis XIV in 1643 to the death of Charles X in 1836. The physical frame, that is to say, was nearly unaltered. Accidents of fatness or thinness made no difference to the authenticity of the image. For six generations it remained the same.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Louis Quinze, the middle figure, as it were, in this flight of time, the original efficiency of this machine or figurehead of monarchy, so far as outward appearance could be believed, had not yet been altogether dispersed into grossness and stupidity. Louis Quinze was born, in fact, and remained remarkably handsome. There is a mezzotint of him, in youth, by Le Blond that must be the best portrait, still extant, of this most famous of all libertines. His dissipation is marked upon his features. In spite of the ineffable and kingly dignity of his bearing, a thing that is impossible in our time because of the clothes we wear, it is suggested in the portrait by a sort of analogy of character, as if in slight shuddering of contempt and contact, that he is in the act of shaking off the powder from some prolonged embrace. And it is more especially in his mouth that his character is to be observed. His lips are quite extraordinary for their expression of disillusionment in all else but venality. This is apparent, again, in his eyes that have little interest and little humour. All of his personality which is not dignity can think of nothing else but this gratification of the senses. And he has not to bother to procure those ends.

This is the tall man who used to drive down from the palace to the Parc aux Cerfs, leave his carriage a little distance away, and walk on foot to the door, upon which he would knock three times. It would be opened to him; and none of its youthful inmates could be certain who was this elderly and gravely dressed man who proceeded immediately to the business of the establishment, seducing the youngest and latest favourite of his

<sup>1</sup>Louis XV was great-grandson to Louis XIV. Louis XVI, and his brothers Louis XVIII and Charles X, were grandsons to Louis XV.

## PORTRAIT OF LOUIS XV

harem. The Parc aux Cerfs, a prototype to all convents and girls' schools in every French farce, had the pretence of being run as an educational establishment, though it may be doubted whether these visits of the King had anything either of serious instruction or light comedy about them. To him, seduction was the only serious thing in life. The other members of his family had their traditional appetite for food. His, was for women: and it was as serious to him as was the art of painting to Boucher, or politics to any of the French statesmen of his reign.

Within a year or two the King was to die of smallpox, caught indiscreetly, it was said, from a little milkmaid who was brought to him; and his blackened and festering body, that none dared touch, was hurried, by night, in its triple coffin of lead through the streets of Paris to its resting place in St. Denis. Of all the chief actors in the drama that led up to the French Revolution, Louis XV, the original instigator of the trouble, was the only person who escaped with as little personal indignity as the posthumous degradation of his corpse; and this, on the analogy of his behaviour when Damiens stabbed him slightly with a penknife and was sentenced after torture, to die the most agonizing death that human ingenuity could devise, this we may be sure, Louis would have preferred. So long as his own body was dead nothing else mattered.

Within twenty-five years the storm had burst. Madame Dubarry, not yet an old woman in years, who had been senseless enough to return to Paris from her safe exile in England in order to collect her jewels, was betrayed by her neighbours at Louveciennes and a few days later was dragged, shrieking for mercy, to the guillotine. Her death, and the reason for it, are typical of her kind. Every episode falls into its proper place in the play. It has the proportions of perfect drama, while the vapid emptiness of its subject or central figure resembles, in this, the detail and proportion of her pavilion at Louveciennes, a shrine for an empty head and an empty heart.

But the shadows of these impending horrors are well con-

## HETAIRAE OF THE EMPIRE

cealed on this evening. Even the guard upon the pavilion seems superfluous and of no more use than as a protection against things being broken, for in its delicacy it is as if they were dining in a vessel of porcelain or glass. As we move round this table, these persons who are marked down for the guillotine or to be thrown from their tombs, headless and limbless, into the charnel pit, have, it is evident, no shadow or cloud upon their minds. The trivial has taken possession of them to the exclusion of everything else. There is not one of them who would be silent, except the King. He is the only person in the room who is disillusioned and not amused. All the others have no time in their lives for anything but talk. Madame Dubarry, the spiritual ancestor of Cora Pearl, of La Paiva, of Gaby Deslys, and more beautiful it is certain than any of them, has the code of manners that would be expected of her. She is the great courtesan of history, having supper with her lover. The Pompadour—what meaning in the name!—who was patron of the arts and auxiliary Queen of France, is not to be compared to this promoter of the royal vices. At the same time, her prevailing character was that of silliness; she was not the venomous and harpy-like adventuress, of whom Cora Pearl was type; Cora Pearl who, though she never learnt to speak any language correctly, even her native English,<sup>1</sup> was immediately master of any man who fell into her power. At this distance of time, Cora Pearl who drove in carriages that were the talk of Paris, is as sordid to us as a ghost under a gaslamp. She is a bad drawing: not a Manet but a Félicien Rops. We can imagine the illness that was to drive her into cheap lodgings, under an assumed name, and to the gin bottle. And, as we write this, we wonder whether there is any person, now living, who has seen her!

As for Madame Dubarry, the proof that she was silly and not wicked was her execution. No one really accomplished in sin,

<sup>1</sup>Cora Pearl, 1842-1886, was the daughter of the Irish composer, Frederick Nicholls Crouch, 1808-1896, author of the well-known ballad 'Kathleen Mavourneen'.

## PORTRAIT OF DUBARRY

soul as well as body, would have come out of a place of safety in order to pursue so foolhardy a project. When we consider that she had been notorious in France for twenty-five years as the last mistress of the dead King Louis XV, the temerity of her return to this villa that had been the scene of so much extravagance and waste is nothing but insane folly, nothing but the fluttering of the moth before the candle flame. Incredible sums of money had been devoted to the building of this small house; but, in the traditions of the common people, these amounts became exaggerated to a fabulous degree till the whole wealth of France was represented as having been wasted within those walls. This bed of roses, in that sense, was one of the craters of the Revolution. It was deliberate extravagance, regardless of the consequences. When she returned to Louveciennes for those few last days, how cold and empty the rooms must have seemed! Here, not long ago, Zamor, her negro page, had given her orders to the liveried servants; and now she was an old woman warming her hands at a brazier in an empty room. When she was dragged to the scaffold, a few days later, it was like the last act of royal favour; it was the last time that, by the King's orders, she was singled out for particular attention.

This end waits for her, to-night, down a darkening vista. But Madame Dubarry, who is only interesting by virtue of her fate, and never for anything that she either said or did, is not to be aware of anything, to-night, but a festal clattering of the dishes. And, to the eyes of a stranger, there would be nothing more remarkable about her appearance than its elaborate artificiality. This painting of the lips and eyelids was practised by her as it had never been since the days of classical antiquity. Its peculiarity makes her belong, almost, to a race apart; and this, indeed, is true of her profession, an Eurasian or middle-white difference, belonging neither to the one nor the other and lying, as it were, between the two races of mankind at the mercy, as it is evident, of both. On this occasion her hair, worn rather short, is profusely powdered and sprinkled liberally with diamonds.

## RELEVANCE OF THESE TYROS

The fineness of her eyebrows is no less artificial. She has darkened eyelashes. And, even so, it is for her natural simplicity that she is admired. In token of which, she wears a little black patch high upon her cheek, as if boasting of a blemish in her skin.

And here it may be remarked, in parenthesis, that it is curious how this period which culminated in the fashions of Marie Antoinette, when the hair was lavishly dressed as never before in history and raised to unprecedented heights above the head, should have ended, as if in irresistible temptation, with the tumbling of so many of these selfsame heads in the dust. Among them all, that of Madame Dubarry, upon which such an excess of attention was bestowed, only in order to achieve an effect of careless simplicity, may well have been one of the most tempting.

The figures that are grouped round this table take on a tragical importance when their destiny is considered, for their world is falling into ruins round them as they dine. To say this is to precipitate the crisis, for, in actual fact, there was perfect security for them over another thirty years. Yet, essentially it is true. Their days were damned: and every detail in their environment partakes of this fatal predestination. It is not light-heartedness, but emptiness that surrounds them. Their importance in our context is to be the symbol of emptiness. An empty head and an empty heart are of more danger to the spirit than an empty stomach. Even the small dimensions of this room on which such a fortune has been lavished are of more potential harm than would have been the case had some vaster project been left incomplete. The ancient superstition that it is more lucky to leave the last stone of a building unfinished, assumes, in such an environment as this, the weight and importance of a deep spiritual truth. For the finish of the jewel box is a more idle extravagance than the jewels that it contains. And yet they deserved their fate no more than does the person who is killed in the traffic because he is deaf, or walks too slow. Natural predisposition lured them to the brink, and after what must

## THE HOUR OF HYDROMEL

have seemed to them a long lifetime they were drawn in and sank into the vortex.

The vision of these headless men and women hovers for a moment in that lit emptiness. And then it vanishes as quickly as it came. Instead, the hour of hydromel is here. The clamour of all the voices comes from the terraces, from the river steps, and from within the groves. We are back again in the balmy air of the thickets. This paradise of the mind and flesh, in its alternations of repose or frenzy, is in the high gala of its day. The abbey bells are pealing, they blow loud upon the sea conch; while the water clock, that is old and creaking, hesitates and tells the hour. At once, to the Triton voice, hydromel or wine of honey is raised to every mouth; even handed down, among the lilies, to the maidens in the water pool. Every living soul in the park lifts hydromel to his lips and drinks the cup, and throws it down. Four episodes are about to play; they are the entertainment of the evening; and, at the same time, are as many arrows quivering in the heart of anyone who beholds them. They strike at the vulnerable part of this paradise and will let it bleed to death. They have taken mark of its deficiencies, and it is doomed.

This is the moment to say farewell to its delights, before the play begins. The Orient languor is going, going before our eyes. This is living, or a phase of it, and the rest is death. The wanderings of the soul after death will occupy us for a little longer. We have to follow it through purgatory: and it is then that we shall regret the annihilation or nothingness that they hope for who live within the red walls and up and down this valley. Who is there, though, who loves emptiness or the cold wind! The touch of hands is better than that, and the sound of voices. And, in the end, we shall see whether we like the company of those others who are lost with us in the night.

Meanwhile, the four scenes that are to follow are our last visions of the living and have been chosen for their contrast to what has gone before. Also, each one of them is typical of some

## THE HOUR OF HYDROMEL

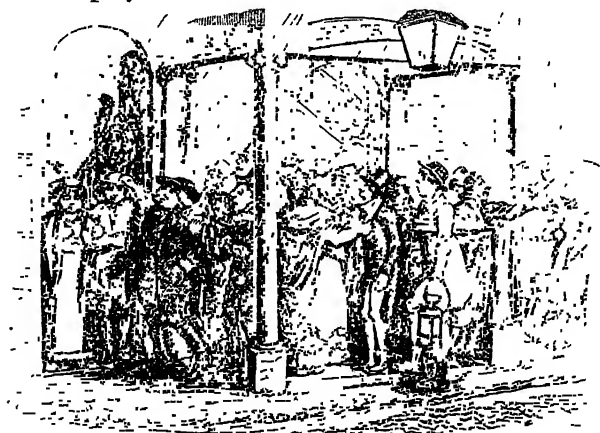
shortcoming in this earthly paradise. They are the play of what is absent from its perfections. In a sense, therefore, they represent what was lost or unachieved during life. Everyone must have his own regrets, and, at such a moment as this, these are the things that are as likely to come into the mind as any picture of happiness, known and enjoyed. The satisfaction of that was in its destruction or devouring; the more ideal it was, the less it is remembered. Its moments can never build into an hour; and, having lived once, it is no use to blow upon those dead bones. The things that have lost their reciprocal life are more painful to think of than those that were never complete, or having had their moment were broken, and in the mutilation became only fragments of what was momentary and never permanent. There are, also, the things that were missing from life as much as they were absent from this imagined paradise. The force of these has a doubled strength in the play and their poignancy points and accentuates the drama. It is necessary, as well, that they should burn in as bright a light as possible for the contrast of the darkness that is to come after. For this reason the last of the four scenes will go up in a flame of sulphur, in order to leave the smell of that in the nostrils and its blinding light in the eyes. For the flash of this is better than a simple falling of the curtain.

And, now, it rises for the beginning, in a hundred amphitheatres, everywhere, in the hills, underneath the trees, upon stone steps above the river, wherever there is more than one person to listen and be silent. Transmutations of magic drift and shudder upon the air for the place and the religion and every other religion is dying, or is dead. Nothing but the touch of hands in life, the gentle and cool hand that calms the forehead, is left. There is no certainty, not even a glimmer out of the ensuing darkness. It is all lost, all lost; that elaborate edifice is tumbled and broken, and had no windows. Those who lived within it deluded themselves that they could look out; but at least this fantasy of belief kept them happy until it was too late

## DYING, DYING, DEAD

to know. No voice spoke back to them out of that utter silence. There is no touch of hands between the living and the dead: dead hands, that are lifted, but drop back again. No! there is only the touch of living hands left to us. Nothing else is lasting comfort. And even that we have to leave behind. Oh! how much longer must we continue in this unbelief? In those last moments there is all the waste to consider, the unrequited and the pain of what is lost. This, also, and the agony of signs given and not apprehended. Do not think that there is one of the dead who would not live again, for they would all come back to us out of the bitter cold. In that last moment we must forsake our false loves, and know who loves us, and hold to their warmth. The wasted time is returned to us: nevertheless, it is gone and only the dead husk of it is put into our hands. Yet it has come back and is forgiven. Nothing, nothing, nothing will last of this. We want to die in the beginning of things, long before this parting, but are on the edge of darkness with all that behind us and distant, now. One is falling back, back into the void, and everything is little and can do no harm. It comes back, as if to the opening of the eyes, and shivers and recedes. The mystery descends. The world burns in astonishing brightness, and goes out. •

This is the play.





## IV THE BANQUET, OR CENACOLO

### I. 'Dumb tones, and shuddering semitones of Death!'

At about six o'clock of a February evening a man and woman enter the Sablonnière restaurant, in Cranbourn Alley off Leicester Square. It is the night of 10 February, 1862. The fourwheeler can be heard driving away, and they come across the floor to a little table out of the gaslight. Now that he has hung up his hat and coat, his red or auburn-red hair falls nearly to his sloping shoulders; for he is very small and had a peculiar walk, just now, and the most extraordinary shoulders. They slope straight down into his body as though their construction was for some particular physical purpose, in order to play some instrument, perhaps, and as if to justify this guess he is for ever fluttering his hands. They are never still for a moment, and he has a voice that is, alternately, shrill and sonorous. So extraordinary is his whole appearance that the clothes he is wearing are of little moment; and, in any case, they are the conventional clothes of the day. There is no difference in them: all the difference is in himself. In fact, he is the most peculiar being ever seen, and calculated, what with one thing and another, with his clothes, his voice, his hair, his hands, to be stared at wherever he goes, and not least of all in this restaurant. He is talking in elaborate French to the waiter; and, in the end, a lot of wine is ordered, and not much food. •

They neither of them eat, when it comes. She plays with a knife and fork, and pushes the plate away, and to keep him

## GHOSTS OF THE TRAGIC EVENING

company with his wine pulls it back again in front of her. But they talk without ceasing, even if, at times, it is his monologue and she only sighs or nods her head in agreement, or as if listening to a verse of poetry that he is reciting. Her spells of silence draw attention to the pallor of her face. She is older than he, or it is that she is ill. She might be nearly thirty, and he must be twenty-five.

Her appearance is no less different, no less estranged from the ordinary. Her character is in her beautiful neck, long and delicate, in the heavy lidding of her eyes, and in the long folds of her dress. She has full lips, but they are pale and bloodless, and so are her cheeks, which, with a little colour, would disclose her youth and freshness. But everything about her is blanched, artificially blanched with illness; pale, it might be said, like celery that has been hidden from the light to make it tender. And, then, in a moment, she will flush red. The beauty comes back into her lips and cheeks; but it is only momentary and in the excitement of something said. Even so, this happens often enough to be a perpetual reminder of her youth, to anyone who watches her. We have said that the character comes, also, from the long folds of her dress. The lines of this are altogether outside contemporary time, however much they may, since, have become a part of it whenever we think of her. It is of some striped material with long sleeves, long waist, and everything done to it that could revoke the age they hated and give to it the semblance of belonging to another time. This was the aim in mind, but its end is only typical of herself, and makes her as noticeable and peculiar as her companion. Also, there can be little doubt that the dress was made by her own hands, and it shows the shortcomings of this, and the faults of a slender purse. Perhaps, as well, she may be too ill to bother much. Even so, it does not need the peculiar lines of her dress to make her remarkable. This, she would be anywhere, and in any company. Perhaps there is a consecration, a sacrament in all her actions, something in her which is as if she is already dead and is only linger-

## GHOSTS OF THE TRAGIC EVENING

ing until she can see the end of something she has loved. But, in spite of her air of sadness, there is nothing cadaverous or disembodied about her; and this is because she is young, and looks a little older than her age, through illness, and is naturally simple and unaffected. It is noticeable that while the poet never ceases from agitating his hands, her hands are generally folded as if she is patient and used to waiting. Also, at times, and for a long while together, she will close her eyes. When she speaks, her voice is soft and low so that it hardly carries as far as the next table in the restaurant. And this is in marked contrast to her companion, who talks as if to be overheard and has, indeed, something flaunting about his whole manner and appearance. Yet, for all the physical difference in them, they are alike and the one is counterpart of the other. Their relationship is that of brother and sister more than that of lovers. But, even so, the vital difference of birth divides them. He could be nothing but aristocratic in his origin, while she has the humility of something that has been hidden for a long time, obscured by poverty and darkened rooms. She has been brought out into the light; and this it is that is killing her.

It is to be seen by anyone who watches them that there is some close bond between them. They are not lovers: they are not brother and sister. It is clearly enough one of those situations in which their affinity is complicated by difficulties that bring them together only to separate them again. Or it is one of those cases in which persons, who are in constant contact together, meet in their souls but never in their bodies. If she is unhappy because of him they would not be talking together quite in that way. When she shuts her eyes it is obvious that the cause of her misery, on which she is now thinking, is outside this present relationship. It is, in fact, her husband. A moment later she has opened her eyes again and listens more attentively because her companion is reciting poetry to her. This love of poetry is one of the links of their friendship. At the same time, something in her air of sacrifice and consecration tells that her

THEY TOUCH BUT HAVE NO CONTACT

husband, on account of whom she is suffering, and who is, therefore, her lover still, must be someone possessed of the same qualities that she admires in this friend with whom she is dining. He must be a poet or an artist, and probably he is older than her companion. This is all surmise from their behaviour and appearance. And, indeed, this young man and woman in all their actions and in everything that they say or do are invested with an air that makes them different from the figures in everyday life. Not only their personalities, but even this particular occasion, is an extraordinary event and attracts the attention of everyone who witnesses it. But, before we pursue our enquiries any further into their history, let us remember the time and place. In that day there were nothing but family hotels in London and the only restaurants were two or three of this character, in the foreign or cosmopolitan part of the town. It is chiefly foreigners who frequent them, and a young man who brings a lady here for dinner is prepared for something of an adventure or is, at least, asserting his knowledge of Paris, where restaurants are already the rule. No other man of his acquaintance would be here unless he was either trying to escape being seen or was dining with someone whom he could not take elsewhere. This much must be said in order to establish that they are no part of the ordinary clientele of the house. But, in truth, both of them are so outside life that in any and every environment they would be exceptional.

Now she closes her eyes for so long a time together, while he goes on talking and appears not to notice it, that one wonders what is passing through her mind and what agony of thought can be afflicting her. It is, however, a thing that she has power to put away from her, for a moment or two later she is talking earnestly to him, and even smiling. Also, she has flushed red again and looks young once more. The quick recovery of her spirit is in sign of her nervous condition. This is, also, the secret of her beauty, though, as soon, she relapses again and sighs deeply, as if too sad to weep. But this is the moment to disclose her iden-

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

tity. It is Miss Siddal, the wife of Rossetti, dining with Swinburne. He had called that evening, to fetch her, as he often did, at the house in Chatham Place; and now that we know they are among the most remarkable men and women of our race who have lived we are better prepared to look at them and never to forget the picture of them on this tragic evening. We may well watch them carefully for one entire phase of poetry depends upon their persons. The creation of this must be the physical purpose behind their strange appearance. And this must sound as if we are about to say that they are lovers, but of that there has never been even the suspicion. Yet no woman ever loved Swinburne except Miss Siddal; and it is clear that he loved no one, not Miss Siddal, not Ada Mencken, not any woman whom he ever met or saw. His life of love was in his own mind; twisted, it may be, into peculiar and unprofitable directions into which it is no part of another writer's business to probe. The centre of his own tragedy lay in himself, out of which, or whom, he was never able to emerge and extricate his emotions, and this is all that need be said about the secret of this greatest poet of that century—always excepting Keats, from whose early grave the flower of his fresh apparition has appeared. No less is this true of Miss Siddal, who is the physical incarnation of the poetry of Keats, of its maladive loveliness and doomed youth. The poetry of Keats, who had been dead for forty years, had just become the intoxication of Swinburne. This is to be found, transmuted by his own genius, in such poems as 'August', 'In the Orchard', 'Anactoria', the flower of that year or two during which he was one of the greatest poets there have ever been. It is just at this time that we see him; and it may have been under the influence of his friendship with Miss Siddal that he wrote these poems. They are, therefore, in some sense, the products of her personality, or ghost, working through him, and this thought gives an additional poignancy to our sight of them both.

To her, this dinner in Cranbourn Alley off Leicester Square

## THE MILLINER'S SHOP

is less of an adventure than it would be to most other women for the reason that she had worked in a milliner's shop, near by in Cranbourn Alley. It was there that the painter Deverell saw her through the window, and coming back announced his discovery to Rossetti, who was quick to profit by the information. She was so much the incarnation of his ideas that she became the obsession of that lively mind to the exclusion of everyone else. Soon they were engaged to be married, but, already, she was ill with consumption and the wedding was put off from year to year while it was supposed that she was gaining strength and would soon recover. Thus it came about that though they were incessantly in each other's company the marriage became, as it were, indefinitely postponed. All this time she was agitating, more perhaps than he realized, for it to take place; and when, at last, they were married it was to a dying woman that he was tied. This was only eighteen months before the evening on which we see her; and she had first met Rossetti nearly ten years before. She had left her home to become a shopgirl only a year before Deverell saw her in the shop window. This had been when she was nineteen years old, so that for all her adult life she had known this quarter of London in which they were dining. She was used to its ways; and the peculiar reserve of her nature made it easy for her to protect herself against its dangers, which were more real, then, than they may seem, now. This same trait of character in her made it essential that Rossetti should marry her and insisted on the delay of this until it was, in effect, too late to be anything but fatal to her health. This was the tragedy of Miss Siddal: and the implications that grew out of it make her the figure of romance that she must always be and, as certainly, brought her to her death.

On this night she is, indeed, very near to it. The immediacy of it depends only upon herself; and, of that, we cannot be quite certain whether she has decided or not. It is when she closes her eyes that she is practising, as it were, for eternal sleep, and then she will, as suddenly, open them and talk and laugh as if to let

## THE MILLINER'S SHOP

anyone say that it was, in half, a happy evening that they spent and that they talked and laughed together without concern. Once or twice she bites her lips, and she has a handkerchief screwed tightly into the ball of her hand, but these are signs that pass without notice from the unworldly being who talks to her, and pours out more wine, and talks again. The air of tragedy deepens because of this monologue into which, from time to time, she interposes a few words or opens her eyes and listens to poetry. It is evident from this that she will do nothing to disturb him or break his mood. He calls for more wine, and puts the bottle in front of him, and calls for brandy. So far as he is concerned there are no other diners in the room; and, if there were, they must listen to him for he grows more and more excited and querulous and his voice ranges from basso to falsetto, up and down the scale, as he speaks. Also, his hands are incessant in their fluttering and now even his shoulders move spasmodically. All of his body is on the quiver and vibrating, so that he is like someone in a religious ecstasy who is about to give prophecy and become the mouthpiece of the god. The double intoxication of wine and poetry shakes and seizes him. It is like watching someone in a fit. The only outlet of this force is in talking, and after a while the spate of it ceases, leaving him exhausted and wanting still more brandy. It is very seldom that she has interrupted this monologue, and the quietness of her few remarks shows the authority that she has over him and is the proof of how often they must have talked together. Therefore it seems, in a sense, as if she has come to this restaurant against her own inclination. She has eaten little or nothing; and, as she is so unhappy, there could be no other reason for coming out to dinner, since this was no clandestine meeting between them, than simply the desire on her part to please him. Also, it draws her far enough outside her own orbit to let her think over her life. And, if we knew the truth of that, we should realize at this late date in her life, how seldom she comes out at all.

## THE MILLINER'S SHOP

It was just ten years ago that she had started work in the shop. And then, one day, that young man looked through the window and came in to see her and brought his friends. That was the end of one life and the beginning of another. This was her rebirth, or at least it was her entry into the life predestined for her. Of this she had never a doubt: neither could anyone else who knew her deny that the very mould into which she had been cast made her separate from the rest of mankind. Her destiny was to be brought out into the light and to die of it.

The missing person in this communication of souls that we are watching is her husband. It was his genius that breathed life into her image. Our own age is not rich enough in talents to deny this title to Rossetti. When he first met Miss Siddal, and she became his model, he was not yet twenty-five years old. He was the rebel painter of that day and a more than promising poet. His very Italian energy had gathered together and launched a movement in the arts that was to last until the end of the century, long after his own death. It is not necessary to go into the details of this because its implications are familiar enough to anyone who is likely to read these pages. This excuse will absolve us from the material facts and leaves us free to develop the drama that we are watching. To begin with, his character is not to be known from the pictures by his hands. He was an Italian, born in London, of Southern Italian parents who were political exiles. His christian names of Dante Gabriel may be taken for indication of where he was born and what was expected of him. At twenty years of age he was already in his maturity and hardly, indeed, developed beyond that, for as the technique of his pictures improved, though this never reached to much more than the level of an amateur, so his inspiration declined. All, then, was in the force of his character. He was vigorous and robust, in contradiction to everything that is left to us of his pictures or poems. He had ribald humour, wrote ribald limericks, and if he saw young women who took his fancy would resort to such expedients as tugging their hair in order to



## DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

get into conversation with them. It was the higher, more solemn side of his nature that made him fall in love with Miss Siddal. This was to involve him in as much agony as it brought pain to her. They fatally injured each other by their affection. She became his model and his inseparable companion, living in his studio and sharing his house, but it is almost certain that her scruples forbade anything but the most fleeting and infrequent intimacy. She would become his wife, but only if well enough, and year after year he was disappointed in this, for she was little better than an invalid. By the time they were married she was doomed, and he must have known that he was marrying a dying woman. For anyone of his ardent temperament this was an unendurable state of affairs; and, long before this, he had begun to look for consolation where it could easily be found. It seems probable that it was because of this, though her health was so desperate, that she again broached the question of marriage in the vain hope of saving him from a worse destiny. At the same time, all the force of his old affection for her was revived from pity, and he let himself be sacrificed, though there was no possible good that could come of it. And so they were married and, almost immediately, her causes of jealousy were resumed.<sup>1</sup> Even now, Rossetti was only some thirty-two or three years old, and was no more capable of becoming a permanent sick nurse than Byron would have been. Whenever he thought of her it will have been with affection, but the symbols of life meant too much to his vigorous spirit. Men will make a vow of eternal love but they are not as much to be believed as women. Even when he said it Rossetti was more likely than not to be in love with someone else, as well. This was a thing that the gentle spirit of Miss Siddal was incapable of understanding. If he loved anyone else, he no longer loved her: and when he began to go out in the evenings without her, her heart must have shrunk into itself. This was the tarnishing of the immortal bond there was between them. She had been taken out of darkness and silence

<sup>1</sup>They were married at Hastings, on 23 May 1860.

## DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

by him, and taught to write and taught to draw; and now it would have been better if she had been left by herself to make her own meal in the evening, and read, and never go out. This was how she had lived before he met her. She harmed no one and had no enemies. But now her image or spirit had been given life by him, and like his own child it was bound to him and had a physical affinity with him that none except his own hands could spoil. It was now that she began a period of unhappiness, to which, we must be afraid, it would be difficult to find a parallel in other lives. As a person she was abnormally sensitive, and had been given a soul, which, because it had arrived so mysteriously, could find nothing else to live upon but that other heart out of which it had been born. He was her only affection. She had tried more than once for a child, and failed. Therefore the injury that her affection suffered in him was inconsolable. She was like an orphan, adopted and dependent; or, more still, like a little servant of another race, a little Indian it might be, who could not escape and had no life but that of those who had been kind to her. We must remember her humble origin, coming out of that shop; and somehow the horror of her sadness is immeasurably increased by the beginnings of poetry in her, her stammerings, as it were, in this unknown tongue that she heard spoken round her. In a curious echo, or prophecy, of a great poem that was to be written many years later it is evident that her thoughts were centred on death.

‘How is it in that unknown land?  
Do the dead wander hand in hand?  
Do we clasp dead hands, and quiver  
With an endless joy for ever?’

‘Hollow hearts are ever near me,  
Soulless eyes have ceased to cheer me.’

This is the testimony of her spirit, and the wanderings of that lonely soul are reflected in them in all her misery and unhappi-

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

ness. We must own, in thinking of them, that the ever increasing legion of those who wonder why they were ever born must number Miss Siddal among themselves. Why should she be so cruelly bruised when she might have been left at peace living her own life of silence, harming no one, and happy in her little room? Her only consolation can have been the thought that this was her destiny and that she could not avoid it. But if this was destiny or fate, the pattern of it was to be discerned coming to an end just before her eyes. She must be true to the direction of that end, indeed, it was no more to be dispelled than the beginnings of her life or that break in it when she was brought out from the shuttered room into the light. The lines of it were inexorable and pointing to the end. This, indeed, was the giving of the poison cup into her hands. The image or glyph of her days is imperfect without that. Every consideration was shaping her into that direction. The unborn child that she was carrying within her she would not allow to be disappointed of dying with her. It was hers, and only hers, and would stay with her. The little knockings of it upon her heart were when it spoke to her, and this was all the communion they would ever have. She would never see it or hear its voice. They were two prisoners, two living souls in the next cells to each other, who never spoke and never saw each other among the living, but rapped out the rudiments of words and met in this manner halfway in their misery. If she was destined to this end of life was there not even a distinction in that, another proof that she was set apart from the rest of the living? But then, if this was so, why was it that she had failed? In her husband she knew, by now, the limitations of his talent and that the flower of it, due to their infatuation, was already over and done with. Now, he was edging away from her and an excuse was ever on his lips. Their old delight in each other was sullied and soiled, as it were by dirty hands. It was a thing broken and never to be resumed. There were spectators and a crowd who looked upon them. Also, her nature had never been so physical as his. She had been certain

## DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

that her kind of affection was stronger than that other and could never die. It had been left to him to prove to her that both sorts were mortal. There was, in fact, no reason to live. The purpose for which she had been created, to inspire, had failed miserably within a year or two, and the rest of life had been a dragging along of weary feet. And so, as she began to relinquish life, she began to love death. Earlier on that winter evening, before she went out, the pattern of her life had been more true to itself than ever. It was only necessary, now, to wait for what would happen when she came in, to lie in bed and hear the same lies and see him go out into the night and know that he was not lecturing but that, if the truth must be said, he was across the river, on the Surrey side of the river, seeing Fanny Hughes. And her, he did not even pretend to love. It was not love, then, that took him away from herself and out into the night. It is one of the cruelties of the living that it is the unphysical who suffer most in jealousy, because they cannot forgive and have no willingness for revenge. With Miss Siddal this is more particularly true, who never recovered from the shock of physical discovery, who became disetherealized in the light of that and found that love had lost its spiritual significance. There were some aspects in her nature that made her like the Sleeping Beauty in the fairy book. She was predestined to be awoken from her trance, but she might live or she might die at the approach of her rescuer. It is the irony in her unhappy life that no sleeping maiden could have had, as rescuer, a lover more true to her dreams and imaginings, but she died from the manly roughness of his touch. She was too delicate to respond to him. It was through being his physical inspiration that she would have taken his soul into dominion, though to believe in the lastingness of this is to believe in every promise rashly made. We may think that his experience of his own broken vows was more sad than the experience of most other men. In his poem we can read:

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

'Along the grass sweet airs are blown  
Our way this day in Spring.  
Of all the songs that we have known  
Now which one shall we sing?  
Not that, my love, ah no!—  
Not this, my love, why, so!—  
Yet both were ours, but hours will come and go.

. . . . .

'The branches cross above our eyes  
The skies are in a net:  
And what's the thing beneath the skies  
We two would most forget?  
Not birth, my love, no, no—  
Not death, my love, no, no—  
The love once ours, but ours long hours ago.'

Nothing could be imagined that was more different from this than the serious thoughts of Miss Siddal when she wrote poems. The contrast in their characters could not be better expressed than in the quotations that we have given from them both. Yet, for all this difference, the echo of their affinity is to be found in it. She wrote in that way because he had taught her to do so; but it is a curious thing that it is really her personality that haunts both poems and, that, of the two, hers has the sincerity and the strength. She is more surely present in this than in the pictures that he painted of her, and we can see her in it just as clear before our eyes as we see her, sitting here in this restaurant, at the table in the corner. She has closed her eyes, once more, and is listening; or, perhaps, she has sunk too deep into her own misery to hear the words.

For, now, there is this friendship of hers to be accounted for. There is no one else, except Swinburne, with whom she is upon these terms, while we may wonder, after this evening, whether he ever dined again alone with any woman, save Ada Mencken. It is difficult, indeed, not to be drawn aside into a consideration

## AFFLATUS

of that. The heroine of 'Dolores' was his only other woman friend; and while we may be sure that Swinburne will have celebrated such occasions with more than his usual libations of wine we must remember that she too, like Miss Siddal, was a lost soul and that her love letters, like these few poems by Miss Siddal, are something lasting and permanent left over from an unhappy life. The two women would have recognized each other from their scanty writings and have been reconciled in the friendship of the poet for them both. At the same time, there was every difference in their influence upon him. As to the reciprocal side of this, the attitude of Swinburne towards Miss Siddal must have been the fulfilment of exactly what was lacking towards her in Rossetti. Or it was the presence of those things that the physical side of Rossetti obscured. He had been, at the start, too much in love with her and, after that, too little concerned with the permanencies of her nature. Swinburne, who did not have it in him to be in love with her, could give her exactly this companionship and sympathy. Also, Swinburne, who was only twenty-five years old, was in the full effulgence of his genius. *Poems and Ballads* were not yet published,<sup>1</sup> but the best of them were already written, and no friend of Swinburne could complain of never having heard his poetry. On the other hand, the side of his nature that was excessively violent, his idolatry for the Marquis de Sade, for instance, had not yet begun to warp his personality. He was the most extraordinary genius that had appeared in poetry since the already legendary figures of Shelley and Keats; and, in the youthful Swinburne, genius was coupled with an appearance that allowed no doubt of its presence. In Miss Siddal, Swinburne will have found just the shell, the empty shell that he required the friendship of a woman to be: a lovely shell, huskless, but echoing on its lips just what he would have it say, or in fact, listening to him. Anything more corporeal than that, for all the frenzy of his talk and behaviour, would have interposed itself

<sup>1</sup>*Poems and Ballads* were published in 1866.

## AFFLATUS

into their friendship. They met together, therefore, in outward admiration for each other, and they had the friendship of the soul and the friendship of the heart. What was missing in them both was that other thing; and, of this, they were both incapable. His frenzy, and the foaming at his lips whenever he writes of this, betray the difficulty of his approach. This was his abnormality. He required the strongest and most violent stimulants; and, in default of their desired effect, he liked them for themselves. As early in his life as this, he was persuading himself that they were not the cause or the excuse but the indispensable accompaniment to those desires which, in his case, were little more than cravings. But the very peculiarity of his angle towards life must have endeared him to this other person who was, also, outside its limits. His physical personality was, in itself, an instrument of poetry. He was, and could be, nothing else than that. But both of them in their different ways were a race apart, coming out of the two opposite ends of the world, for he was an aristocrat and she had come out of the smoke of a northern town and from behind the counter in a milliner's shop. But it made no difference. They met together in poetry and were signed of the same blood in that. They were male and female of the race; few in number, but of the same blood as those others whom they admired in the past. This affinity made one kind of affection impossible between them because of their identity of blood. They were as brother and sister, but without that possibility of one parent's imposing his or her personality to the exclusion of the other. Between such persons as these there is instinctive affection; and perhaps its perfect balance and reciprocity calls for no emphasis or assertion and since it is so entirely natural may pass for being less deep than is really the truth. This is not, in fact, intended to be an account of a passionate emotion, but it is the study of two characters who were outside life and who were linked together because of that. Their disembodied and uncorporeal affection has a pathos which is lacking in the more normal contingencies. Both of

THE THREE PHANTOMS OF MISS SIDDAL  
them were so ill suited for life. She made her own exit from it: and he became a life prisoner in a shared house, the semi-detached 'Pines', on Putney Hill.

If we look more closely at Miss Siddal, sitting in her corner, we may perceive in her three phantoms, corresponding to time's three divisions. She casts her shadow, or it comes back to her, from the appearance that she is trying to copy in her clothes. This is a conscious mediaevalism; but its effect is to make her, not the figure out of an Italian picture which was her intention, but into the living embodiment of the Romanticism of a previous generation, of 'The Eve of St. Agnes' and the poems that they had read together years ago, before the waning of their love. It was this thought that always dragged Rossetti back into his real self, or into his youth, for the constrictions placed by her conscience or her illness upon their friendship made it seem like the prolongation of that wonderful period in his adolescence. That had been a harmless but imperishable fever that possessed them. It was going to burn for ever. Nothing would extinguish it. The second of those phantoms, or they are a series of superimposed shadows, is her authentic or contemporary self. This is to be typical for us of its own time. That Pre-Raphaelite shadow is the end of the 'fifties and the early 'sixties: and, for an antidote, it is unconvincing to look at Winterhalter, who represented Paris more than London, or at the old-fashioned Surtees, whose novels were only true of the remote shires. The re-awakening of the aesthetic conscience needed this effort of the will in order to combat the careless ugliness of industry and the age of smoke. And this brings us immediately to the third of these shadows. It projects far into the future. It is no less than the whole of our aesthetic movement, emanating out of Miss Siddal's languorous poses. In all the nineteenth century England was the only country which devoted its best energies to the conscious culture of something that was irrevocably dead. Deliberate affectations of speech and dress were the outcome of this striving after the unattainable; and nowhere else



THE THREE PHANTOMS OF MISS SIDDAL have they ever been considered the indispensable accompaniment to intelligence. They are satirized as being of South Kensington, in *Patience*; and they are no less true to-day, of the squares of Bloomsbury. Out of all this energy, which began in the 'forties and is hardly ended yet, we are left with a little of Swinburne, written at an early age, and with perhaps a like amount of W. B. Yeats. So it may seem, now, though when the enthusiasm of new discoveries, made elsewhere years before, has worn off, when the addition is to be made of all this total, it will surely be found that more survives from that distant past than is true of our exiguous present. A little of Millais, more particularly his *Blind Girl*, most of J. F. Lewis, and an admittedly minor painter like Arthur Hughes, none of these are of such small account that they can be forgotten for the works of present-day giants. Whether this be so, or not, it is at least certain that the one great artist involved was Swinburne. We return, therefore, to the importance of his last meeting with Miss Siddal. It has already been explained that the sentiment existing between them must not be exaggerated; but the man and woman who were most typical of this phase of our literary history (and painting, in England, is ever the handmaiden of literature) cannot fail to interest us at their last meeting together. She is the heart of all the women aesthetes there have ever been, while he is unique and incontestable. The whole of Pre-Raphaelitism is expressed in their personalities: and, besides that, there is the tragedy of their isolation and of their fruitless and unprofitable affection, of a sort which must occur somewhere in the experience of every reader of these pages. In the impossibility of that barrier being broken down between them it is almost as if she was so much older than he that their relationship was something to be looked upon furtively and with shame; or it was as if, for all the consanguinity that we have mentioned, he had fallen in love with someone of so far distant a race that they had to stay apart from each other because of the shame and danger in their progeny. And yet there is no ques-

THE THREE PHANTOMS OF MISS SIDDAL

tion of love between them. She was ill enough, and coming near enough to death, to smile at his proofs of life; while he admired in her the shell, as it were, or the external ghost of poetry, and conveniently for him there was no need to make love behind the mask. Where the relationship is not that of lovers, nor of brother and sister, there is need of a neuter term to describe its course. Neither of them had the longing for any other bond to be between them. This was enough: and perhaps for them both, it was as far as they ever travelled in the way of that happiness. They were not outside its necessity, but only incapable of its achievement. On the contrary, to be left outside the possibility of its enjoyments was their misery in life; but, while he struggled furiously not to be deprived, she was resigned from the first. Her fate was implicit in her appearance, the points of which are pathos and an early death. His character, on the other hand, is to be gauged in the violent auburn of his hair and in his jerky and spasmodic movements. On this particular occasion too, he was more than a little drunk, which made for the increase of these phenomena. And poor Miss Siddal, who had taken drops of laudanum before he came to fetch her at Chatham Place, all her craving was to be stilled and not excited. The agony of her consumption and her weakness after her still-born child of last year,<sup>1</sup> it was owing to these things that she slept with a bottle of laudanum under her pillow. Without laudanum, by this time, she could neither sleep nor eat. There were times when she had taken a hundred drops of it in order to quiet herself. In the light of this knowledge we can see another reason why she closes her eyes for long moments at a time. The force of the drug drags her away out of the life that she dreads. Her craving is for a sedative, for an allaying of her pains. With Swinburne, it is just the contrary. Brandy inflames him, and gives him the changed focus that is the half of inspiration. The music sings in his ears, and he is seized and shaken by the sacred tremors. He is lifted into life by this fire of intoxica-

<sup>1</sup>It was born in April or May of 1861.

## THE INEXPRESSIBLE PHANTOM

tion. His normality is when he is drunk, for it is only then that he is free of life and that his thoughts can move in it swiftly and without awkwardness. In fact, the Pindaric mood is upon him whenever he is successfully drunk; and this word is of as much import in poetry as are the names of the classical orders in architecture. Or, in another sphere, it can be compared to that moment when the speed-boat suddenly increases her pace and, lifting her prow out of the water, scuds along the surface of the waves, 'on the step', as it is called, and no longer concerned with their depths, but flying freely and of her own volition, moment after moment and for as long as need may be, until, upon the whim of a mood, she as quickly comes down upon the sea and in a breath is slow and ordinary, heading for the harbour. So did the afflatus of drink run its course in Swinburne, and in the ebb of it he relapsed again into the person who was awkwardly outside life.

This man and woman with auburn hair are, at least, conscious of their rarity. And this was a truth which did not admit of contradiction and could be supported by every proof that was dear to the hearts of the Romantic Age. In this sense Swinburne was more related to the greater world of the Romantics than was any other person associated with our own Pre-Raphaelites. He is to be traced, not in direct influence but in consanguinity of idea, to such a figure as the poet Alfieri, as red-haired as Swinburne and of as ancient lineage, who went over Europe, even to Norway, with his white horses, and in final affirmation of his romanticism contracted marriage with the Comtesse d'Albanie, relict of the Young Pretender. But, more than all, and ensuring, for this reason, the very recent condescension towards himself of the Surrealists who have lately disinterred his prose, if not his poems, more than to all other forebears of his race of romantics, Swinburne paid homage to the Marquis de Sade. He even boasted of a distant connection with him through the Grimaldi family, rulers of Monaco. The importance of this influence upon Swinburne has only, lately, begun to run the risks

## THE INEXPRESSIBLE PHANTOM

of publication, but it was familiar to all his circle of friends. 'Close your ears to the clatter of bayonets, the yelping of the cannons; turn aside your gaze from the changing tides of battles lost or won; and then you will see an immense shining and inexpressible phantom arise from the shadows; you will see dawning over a whole star-sown epoch the enormous and sinister figure of the Marquis de Sade.'<sup>1</sup> These are Swinburne's words, and there is no reason to doubt his sincerity. However, to outward and easier criticism, it was Keats who was the derivation of the early Swinburne. It is in this that his personification mates most admirably with Miss Siddal. Not that something of romance was absent, even from Miss Siddal's descent. Her family had owned Hope Hall, on the moors above Sheffield, and had come down in the world from their mediaeval knighthood. This distant glamour brought her more near than ever to 'The Eve of St. Agnes'. She was most perfectly appropriate to that background. And, rising out of it, images of the mill stream and the weir: of the long grass and the blossoming orchard: of the cornfield that was like a sweet honeycomb, uncut: of a dovecote full of white doves: of a dove-grey crinoline, and an upturned face with sad straight hair, looking with closed eyes into a little birdcage that dangled in the sunlight: these images that mean the Pre-Raphaelites to our minds owe their creation to the poetry of Swinburne and the personality of Miss Siddal. This must not blind us to the negative side of their friendship, which is, indeed, its interest to us. Their platonic relationship, that neither of them wished to be otherwise, is one half of the drama, for there are certain people bound together by ties that are closer than any physical love, who would seem to be separated for ever in this world. It is as if some previous fault had ordained that they should go through one life, in perpetual contact, but meeting ever in the heart and never in the body. This love, though, is more slow in waning, and this is its reward. The other part of the drama is in the portrayal of a person who was

<sup>1</sup>Cf. *A History of Surrealism*, by David Gascoyne, Faber & Faber, 1935.

## THE INEXPRESSIBLE PHANTOM

destined to such inspiration upon talent and to have a personality which has so long survived its pathetic possibilities of happiness. It is a study, therefore, of the influence that a woman can exert upon the mind and imagination of men, not upon their hearts but their souls. This does not occur so frequently in the world that it can be passed by, without comment. The beginnings or stammerings of creation in her make it the more poignant. On the very rare occasions in history when that gift of creation has, also, been present in women it is due from those who have witnessed it that they should leave a record of that flowering. Having lived since early childhood, but now with lamentable intervals, in the flowering shade of a figure who is not less remarkable in appearance and in personality than Miss Siddal and not less talented, at a mild computation, than Christina Rossetti, the writer of these pages may lay claim to an inborn comprehension where this part of his subject is concerned. The discerning reader will know to whom he refers. The invention of another imagery: the houses, white as salt, like the houses of Cadiz, and haunted by the Spanish Captain: the long steel grass and the cat's serenade in the moonlight: a hundred, or a thousand, metaphors in which old truths find fresh light and there are constant discoveries of new values: the wisdom clashing from an uncommon rhyme: the contradiction, and then the unfastening of symbols: the endless proofs of intuition and observation, things not perceived through the eyes but absorbed into the intelligence: the force and the daring vigour, in boniness of construction, for poems need bones, and the wonder of their subsequent clothing with flesh: the stores of imagery, gathered in richness as they have seldom been: the sparkle and brilliance and *brio*, concealing sadness, and bearing investigation and enquiry for as long a time as nearly any fibre of poetry that is left to us: these considerations cannot fail of a peculiar aptitude when we return again to think of Miss Siddal.

For she is still before our eyes, in her long trailing dress, of striped silk, leaning her chin upon her hands. She is so present

## ANTI-CRINOLINE

a part of aesthetic experience that it is difficult to believe that this evening on which we see her is nearly seventy-five years ago. The pallor of her skin is heightened by the gaslamps; while her auburn-red hair, that is golden in sunlight, has become darkened and is the colour of a bloodstain or of dried blood. The dark length of it is almost threatening, with no light out of its tresses. This is the time of the crinoline, but Miss Siddal will not wear that. Because of this, only, she is as different as a gypsy from other women. Her long, narrow hips, which are her pride, put her apart from fashion. This was the distinguishing mark of the other women of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. A painstaking diarist, Mary Howitt, notes down: 'On Friday evening, June 20th, 1861, we went to a great Pre-Raphaelite crush. Their pictures covered the walls and their sketchbooks the tables. The uncrinolined women, with their wild hair which was very beautiful, their picturesque dresses and rich colourings, looked like figures out of some Pre-Raphaelite picture. It was very curious. I think of it now like some hot struggling dream in which the gorgeous and fantastic forms moved slowly about. They seemed all so young and so kindred to each other that I felt out of place, though I admired them all.'<sup>1</sup> Anyone, of even little experience in the world, will know Miss Siddal from her dress and appearance. It is a kind of instinct that attaches people, at sight, to the groups to which they belong; but in no instance could this be more easy than where Swinburne and Miss Siddal are concerned. They are the aesthetic movement in epitome. The green and dove-grey stripes of her dress<sup>2</sup> only lengthen the straight lines that are her protest against contemporary time. Even so, she is young enough, with her slim figure and delicate features, to wear a crinoline with enchanting effect and to look her best in a fashionable bonnet with her soft features framed in by the light

<sup>1</sup>*The Wife of Rossetti*, by Violet Hunt, John Lane & Co., 1932, p. 272.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.* p. 315. The dress is here described as of brown and black striped silk.

## ANTI-CRINOLINE

silks and ribbons of its lining.<sup>1</sup> But it is too late for that. Five years ago, perhaps, but not now, when the hand of death is upon her. Those are conceits that she has put far away. She has been ill for too long and the laudanum bottle is under her pillow: laudanum, that needs brandy or whisky to drown it. Even to feel well again only means more worry and more unhappiness. It is better that things should be as they are: it is not for ever. And, thinking thus, she seems to grow into the straightness of her dress: the long thin folds of it are drawn out, like the dank water weeds upon the current, till she is the living Ophelia of the picture.<sup>2</sup> In that, she is dead already, having posed for long weeks together as one dead. Nothing could have better suited the beauty of this person who was ever half outside life. The chill of fireless rooms and little meals had entered into her. This had been her childhood; and, after that, the dark shop with long hours of work and a glass of milk or a cup of tea behind the hatboxes. It must be remembered that she was always poor. Even when they were married it was necessary to live in lodgings. At Chatham Place their rooms were upon the third floor. She had worked in a shop and was now a painter's model; while her sisters would have liked posts as governesses. This was the pathos of how she had been born into life, in a family that had come in a generation or two from Hopedale to Sheffield and then to the Old Kent Road, where she was born. At Chatham Place they had no servants, only a charwoman, and it was a treat to be taken to dinner at the Sablonnière. Seeing her silence and her good looks and her love of reading, her family had always told her that she was to be a genius, and that she was apart from other people. Only the last part of this prophecy had come true. The rest of it was unfulfilled. But, as to her solitude, this she was determined to increase. To those who knew her before, the lines of her face had altered. She had always looked unhappy, and now she was unhappy. But it was

<sup>1</sup>*The Wife of Rossetti*, by Violet Hunt, John Lane & Co., 1932, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup>*Ophelia*, by J. E. Millais, in the National Gallery.

## INTERRUPTION

her character that had really changed. Her gentleness was growing into shrewishness. She would answer in a bitter, hard voice; and this person in whom there had never been sign of her slum surroundings would be full of reproaches, and then, or if she had lived for a little longer, would have been ridiculous in her affected dress and mannered ways. The one life, that is all we get, had not been fair to her. She had been predestined to obsess and inspire: and, to some other being upon her own spiritual level, the difficulty and delays of ill health and the scruples of conscience would but have sanctified their love. She had to have the love that is half pity. She had been found by someone whose ardency had inspired every vow, and had caused them all to be broken. Now, when he promised she did not believe him. And they were not even promises, but only excuses. The time for promises was over. There was nothing more to be gained by them: nothing to give and nothing to keep. And as for romance or poetry, what was there left of that! She had been quicker sullied and quicker shrivelled than she could have believed. Her heart had become a little tight thing, dried up, and giving out nothing. She, who was used to living upon milk and tea, now lived on laudanum, and was ill without it. The fire of the brandy or whisky burnt into her thin body, and then that gnawing stopped. The comfort of the smoky slums came down and hid everything, so that it was like beginning life again: and then the horror would dawn, once more, and the aching to be lifted out of it. Or, with less trouble, to sink through it into blackness.

Now, suddenly, the door opens—the door of the Sablonnière. It is still early, only eight o'clock,<sup>1</sup> and the night is young. The noise of Leicester Square comes in; and a cold air of that February night, enough to cause people to turn round and pull their coats about them. With it come footsteps, and the crushing of wide dresses through a narrow door. Two streetwalkers have advanced into the room, shaking out their little umbrellas

<sup>1</sup>They dined at seven.



## INTERRUPTION

and adjusting their crinolines. It is necessary to smooth these down and spread them out, as though going round the edges of a little tent: looking, that while, down at the floor and behind them. This gives time for their dresses to be seen and to attract the attention of anyone curious to see their faces as they look up. This long-drawn delay is to advertise their charms; but the artifice fails for the manager is appalled at them and, as they look round from table to table seeking, or pretending to seek a friend, he takes them to the door and asks that they should leave. At this they turn impertinent; and had they been given time would have mocked the corner table in broken English, or in their Belgian-French. Hardly is this done when the door turns once more and a man comes in who looks about him and goes straight up to that table, reinforcing, as it might be, the man and woman who had just drawn down that laughter upon themselves for their odd dress and remarkable appearance. He must have met the two streetwalkers upon the pavement, coming out. It is Rossetti, as we know from his dark Italian swarthinness and from the bow of Michelangelo across his forehead. He sits down with them and drinks a little, talking the while with so much more vitality than his silent wife or the drunken, and now comatose, poet. He is in lively humour, telling stories in his deep and grand voice and laughing a lot. Perhaps he is only silent when he is alone with her at Chatham Place. But Swinburne wakes up from his trance and stretches out his hand to take the bottle; whereupon Miss Siddal tries to remonstrate with him, and while she does this her own head nods and lolls and she pulls herself together with an effort and is falsely and feverishly bright. Swinburne resents the interference. It is enough for a quarrel to begin. The waiters and some of the other diners have been watching them a long time, for while his condition could never be misunderstood, from the start of the evening, her drowsiness and her long spells of silence have turned into this nodding of the head, this mannered and drowsy incapacity. At such moments both of them are obli-

## THE CUP OF LAUDANUM

ous of their surroundings. With the arrival of Rossetti they are merely stirred out of this into a quarrel. And now she is falsely bright, and flighty, as if in pretence that her drowsiness was all pose. To Rossetti, even if he was used to this, the pair of them can have been no less peculiar and not normal than to the eyes of those that were watching them, who were accustomed, when they saw drunkenness, that it should be in ordinary revellers and not in this corpse-like young woman and this red-haired man. That only emphasized the obvious truth. It was time they left. The bill was brought and paid recklessly, without a scrutiny.

They parted with Swinburne on the pavement and began the long drive home in a fourwheeler along empty, gaslit Pimlico. The poet may be seen walking away with much dignity and indecision down Leicester Square. His tall, stovepipe hat, crowning his mass of auburn hair, reminds us of Paderewski, in his top-hat. Both are of the lion tribe, and apart from other men; the puny Swinburne no less than the lithe and agile pianist in his prime. As for Miss Siddal, she was very drowsy in the cold of the cab, and sat still and would not speak. She would not take his hand and it was evident that she was deep in thought, even though this was but the daydream of her drugged mind. For this, it was as if stillness was essential. The leather padding of the cab was icy cold to the touch and the wooden floor had its winter covering of straw which rattled like dead reeds and gave no warmth. The long porticos of Pimlico, all dark but numbered with great letters as if they were mansions of the dead, came past in endless enfilade, street after street, with cross streets that ended in darkness. And then, at last, there was the river, in an icy black gulf of swirling waters; and the long steep breathless stairs, with matches to be struck, and then the crocus gas. There were lodgers above and below them, and it was early in the evening, not yet nine o'clock. She started to undress, too ill to do anything but go to bed. He was anxious for this and tried to hurry her, suspiciously hastening it, so as to

## THE CUP OF LAUDANUM

be free of her before it was too late. She would be dead asleep, with more laudanum, when he came in. He could not reproach her with drowsiness, for his own evening depended upon her becoming more drowsy still. And now, when she was ready, he admitted that he had to go. It was his evening at the Working Men's College, and he must go there for an hour or two. At this her mood changed, not from drowsiness into feverish brightness, but trying to conquer her ineptitude and to show her strength. She pleaded with him not to leave her, twisting her necklace round and round in her hand and saying to him: 'Stay with me, Gug, stay with me.'<sup>1</sup> This moved him not at all: and now, clapping her hand to her side, she threatened him with another miscarriage. He was still hard with her, hating the loud pitch to which she raised her voice, a new trick she had learned and did not have before, and not believing her. It was her fantasy, and her threat to hold over him. We are told that, half undressed, she followed him to the landing and stayed hanging over the banisters, shrieking: 'Go then, and you'll kill this baby as you killed the last', to his descending shadow. And after this she must have set about the business of the night, loading her tumbler with the laudanum from underneath her pillow, pouring the brandy into it, and looking for, or finding, more. Soon, very soon, she will have laid herself down, after finishing. It had all the impulse of a sudden wave of feeling. Nothing else in the room was touched or disturbed. The straw from off the floor of the cab was still sticking to the hem of her dress, for she had not bothered to shake it off. And, pinned to her white nightdress, was a piece of paper with the words written on it: 'My life is so miserable I wish for no more of it.' It was thus that she was found, some hours later, with an empty phial by her side, when Rossetti came back to her.

She was dead asleep, suspiciously and deadly asleep, and

<sup>1</sup>All the details of this scene are taken from *The Wife of Rossetti*, by Violet Hunt, John Lane & Co., 1932. This book is a mine of information upon the Pre-Raphaelites.

## DEATH AND THE VIRGIN

black in the face. Nothing would wake her. And, all the time, a loud and ominous snoring came from her throat and nose. This is the most terrible of sounds, to those who have heard it, for it suggests that some exterior force has entered and taken possession.<sup>1</sup> The doctor was called and stayed with her till six o'clock in the morning, trying the stomach pump, but to no avail, and injecting several quarts of water into her stomach. She must have died just before the winter daylight began.

The trancelike state of this Ophelia with the livid face was to continue for several days until her coffin was closed. There were friends of Rossetti who, remembering how he read Edgar Allan Poe aloud, wondered if this were the trance of a Ligeia or a Morella, and ran to the doctor that he should have another look at her. Meanwhile, the sordid details of the inquest dragged to their close: Rossetti was exonerated from all blame, and her death was ascribed, happily enough, as an accidental overdose of laudanum. The time came for the closing of her coffin. One of her white doves, which had escaped and flown away, the week before, came back and tapped with its beak upon the window pane just as the undertakers were at work upon her body. The landlady let it in and it died from exhaustion upon the window sill. This they placed, with its folded wings, by her side in the coffin; and, at the last moment, Rossetti, who had not dared to look at her body since that night, came into the room with a green-bound manuscript book of his unpublished poems and, still not looking her in the face, lifted the napkin and laid the book on the left side, between her hair and her cheek. With this, and with the other, she was buried in Highgate Cemetery, in the great hecatomb.

The decline of Rossetti into the chronic victim of chloral began from that day. He was to live for twenty years more but his genius had left him. He brooded in ever-increasing melan-

<sup>1</sup>The writer remembers\*Robert Ross describing the appalling death rattle of Oscar Wilde, that continued all through the night as he lay dying at the Hotel d'Alsace in Paris.

## GHOSTS

choly, and there can be no doubt that he imagined himself to be haunted. There is a curious story of how, staying at Penkhill Castle, in Ayrshire, he went for a walk along the cliffs with William Bell Scott, and a little bird hopped along by his side, chirping to him, and made little fluttering flights and came back to him. This he declared to be the spirit of Miss Siddal; and coming back to the house they found that the great bell of the castle had never ceased ringing, by itself, and without the touch of any hand, while they were upon their walk. There must have been other, and less pitiful, appearances.

Nine years after her death the story of her corpse comes to an end with the indiscretion of taste by which Rossetti, wishing to reclaim his poems and publish them, caused her coffin to be opened. The permission of the Home Office was obtained: and, in an early winter morning of 1869, a fire was lit beside her grave. Into this the gravediggers descended, while Rossetti with his friends waited by the warmth above. He dared not look into the coffin; he even left express instructions in his will that on no account was he to be buried in Highgate Cemetery; but the book was given into his hands. Her auburn hair had grown across and entwined its mildewed green binding; but, after the stained and discoloured pages had been chemically treated, Rossetti transcribed the poems and they were printed. After this, Rossetti never painted another good picture, nor wrote a good poem. For the rest of his life he was the victim of chloral.

## NOTE

It is necessary to point out that had a verdict of wilful suicide been brought in at the Coroner's inquest, the body of Miss Siddal, according to the laws of that time, could never have been buried in consecrated ground. There was, thus, every inducement to her friends to prove an accidental death. They had,

## GHOSTS

also, to clear the name of Rossetti; who, for instance, had it become known that he was not in reality lecturing on that evening at the Working Men's College, would have emerged somewhat badly from the case. Even graver implications might have been attached to him; but, of this, most mercifully there was no word in court, and it is certain that nothing of the kind should be believed. His complete innocence in the matter is beyond question. There is, though, no doubt whatever that some friend had taken away and destroyed the note that was found pinned to Miss Siddal's nightdress. Its discovery and publication would have altered the verdict of accidental death from an overdose of poison. The unhappiness of her life, and its causes, would, then, have been revealed. Finally, I must plead poetic licence; for, in reality, Rossetti was present all the evening at the dinner that I have described. But Swinburne and Miss Siddal had dined alone together often before; and, therefore, historical truth has only been contradicted during that half hour or hour before I have made Rossetti come in to join them. With that exception, the situation is as accurate as I can make it; and I do not think it possible that I can have injured the feelings of any relatives of those concerned in the story. That has, certainly, been far from my intention.



## IV THE BANQUET, OR CENACOLO

### 2. The Goldberg Variations

Everything is asleep. Such stillness holds the earth that it is almost death. When you open your eyes it is pitch dark and pleasant to lie quiet. It is the interior of a room, with not a sound and nothing, nothing to be seen. You can feel the height of the room and the heavy long curtains.

A cinder falls in the grate, sudden, but as of long determination; only a glow is left in the coals and it is the deep middle of the night. There are all those hours to lie awake and listen. Another cinder clinks against the grate and a moment later a clock strikes. It is the stable clock, set high above the courtyard to tell time to the servants. A church, from far off, chimes in upon it and, before they are finished, every clock in the house begins. A little minuet or gavotte sounds up from the floor below: while strains, more sensible and solid, come through the wall in elaborate mechanism from next door. It has masculine gravity and middle age, as it were a long periwig and ruffles at the sleeves. But the insistent hours strike in from all around. Now there is chiming from a room above and a dwarf voice, like a little watch held in the hand, or by the bedside. The minuet, from down below, ends and begins again. Another masculine voice breaks in, near at hand through the thickness of a wall.

The automata, big and little, play in their pride and in order to be aware of each other. They are not live beings: they have not even been given human or animal form: but it is to be considered that they are possessed of obedience and punctilio. The clockwork conscience must exist below their cupolas of

## TOMPION IN HIS CLOCK SHOP

ebony and silver and behind the engraved metal that protects their heart. These registers of dying time display their pride in never quickening or slowing their pace; but in no case is the length of their steps the same. Each has its individual stride. If two clocks begin to chime in unison, one, of course, overtakes or lags behind. The beginning of the minuet chimes with that more masculine voice next door; but both, in mutual intricacy of step, moved apart the sooner to return again. And, in between them, until gruffer accents came, the dwarf timepiece ticked with little tottering steps. Sometimes, in the whole voice of all these chimings, it will be one that pursues or that surrenders; and, again, both will elaborate their intervals or strike in harmony.

The creators of these puppets must have had, above all things, patience. It was necessary to have a long life, yourself, in order to accommodate this dividing or parcelling of time. Perhaps it was more of a northern or winter labour, working with the glass and with the candle, independent of daylight. The perfecting of a clock demanded, perhaps, a year or more in finishing and checking, so that each one of these voices that are chiming in this darkness must have stood for long months upon the shelf in the ticking and chiming stillness of the shop. When morning came they were dusted and examined: and every day, or week, or month, were wound up and replaced again. It is different, here. Each clock has its own sphere where it reigns in time. The noise of the clock shop, both by day and night, is to be heard most miraculously in the name of our Thomas Tompion, the great clockmaker of Fleet Street.<sup>1</sup> The hammering: the quick and brisk key-turns: the loud and multitudinous ticking: the chiming of the hours: all are in that sound. In his name is the epitome of his calling. It is to be considered that such a man was a considerable artist, half silversmith and half musician, with a closer contingency than might be imagined to our immediate subject. And, such was his fame as craftsman, it is

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Tompion, b. 1639, d. 1713.



## NOISES OF THE NIGHT

even likely' that some of these sober voices may have been of his making. All of them, even the latest to come in, are striking out the hour, which is not midnight, but early morning. Everyone is asleep, with wig laid aside and a nightgown, or nothing at all, upon his body. As for Tompion, he is dead, and would not even remember the names of his apprentices or the prices of his clocks. He is dead and does not occur to us again.

And, by now, the clocks are finishing. The stable clock has done and, next, the French clock with the minuet. Then, the Lilliputian dies: and the two male voices, in separation and combined, end their argument upon a harmony. All is still again. The pitch dark night surges back into the room. But, now, the night scents are stirring, and you can smell and hear the rain. It is the outside world, as dark as this, but indifferent to those inner sounds of rooms. But the bed asserts itself again in the mind, as it did before the clocks began; and it is a foreign bed of balloonlike bolsters laid upon the feet. Their weight draws the blood away from the head, so that the people of this house are deep drinkers or suffer from great cold. It is perpetual winter in their minds, a winter of cordials and hot possets; but to the stranger or non-participant sleep is difficult because of the unfamiliar bedclothes, and, at the same time, the head is left preternaturally clear, remembering everything and forgetting nothing. When a voice speaks it will be in foreign accents, or High German. That will be when daylight comes but, now, there is not a glimmer through the curtains. It is to be noted that the chiming of the clocks was like an interior or artificial lighting of the rooms. It was not daylight: nor was it the live men and women of the house. Clocks are their domestic belongings, wound by hand, and approximating, if we can believe this of inanimate objects, to something of their owner's character or gait. But not at all. This has never been noticed of them. Their character is their own. They are middle-aged and conscientious servants in the regular routine of their duties. Like the servants collected by Dean Swift, 'they are a race of

## NOISES OF THE NIGHT

orderly, elderly persons of both sexes at command,\* who are of no consequence, and have gifts proper for 'attending us, who can bawl when we are deaf, and can tread softly when we are only giddy and would sleep'. They only assert themselves in this total silence, and the rest of the time are on sentry-go and call the quarters of the hours. It is their fugal entry at each hour, planned, as it were, an hour in advance, that is our interest. Especially at midnight, only this is past, the clamour of all their voices is as loud as in the clock shop. We have described their weight and gravity. Here is no French elegance or frippery. But, since the rest of the night is to be sleepless, it is profitable to think of some other contingency of clocks. There was, for instance, the palace in Madrid. There were clocks in every room and exotic birds in gilded cages. The greatest singer,<sup>1</sup> a castrato or male soprano, and the greatest harpsichordist of the time<sup>2</sup> had perpetual employment there and were credited with being the lovers of the two queens. The servants who opened the cages to feed the birds and the men who came to wind the clocks had to tread softly because of music. But the thrumming of the Spanish mandoline is alien to this room in which we find ourselves and has to be put outside our thoughts as disturbing and equivocal to calm. It is bad enough to be so wide awake. The clocks strike the half hour, so that time is moving on leaden feet within the house. The long sleepless agony, from half past two, stretches ahead into infinity: and now, as by a miracle, the hour comes back. All the clocks begin; while, by the same token, there is the scratching of tinder from next door and, after long delay, a candle is lit. Immediately, High German is spoken and answered from a room beyond. The voices belong to Count Kayserling and his chamber musician or virtuoso, Goldberg. Count Kayserling was Russian Envoy to the Court of Frederick Augustus II, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland. The scene, therefore, is either Dresden, or it can be some castle in the country and, for our purpose, there is no need to be

<sup>1</sup>Farinelli.

<sup>2</sup>Domenico Scarlatti.

## THE VARIATIONS

more precise than that. We have said that a candle was lit, and only a moment later the music begins.

Count Kayserling was, like ourselves upon this particular occasion, a sufferer from insomnia. It was complicated, in his case, by the pains of neuralgia. It is now that Johann Sebastian Bach enters this history. It is to be understood that Goldberg, who was not much more than twenty years of age at this time and a brilliant performer upon the harpsichord, had been his pupil. According to Forkel, the biographer of Bach, whenever Count Kayserling had a sleepless night: 'Goldberg had on these occasions to spend the night in an adjoining room, so as to be able to play to him when he could not sleep. Once Count Kayserling said that he would like Bach to write some clavichord pieces for Goldberg, of a quiet and at the same time cheerful character, that would brighten him up on his sleepless nights. Bach thought the best thing for the purpose would be some Variations. . . . Count Kayserling afterwards called them *his* Variations. He could not hear them often enough, and for a long time, whenever he had a sleepless night, it was "Dear Goldberg, play me one of my Variations." Bach was, perhaps, never so well rewarded for any of his works as for this. Kayserling gave him a golden goblet containing 100 louis d'or.' This, then, is the music that we hear in the darkness through the open door. It begins with the air, which is a saraband written in a style exceptional with Bach—that of an air *à la mode*, with a profusion of *galant* ornaments, treated after the manner of contemporary French *chansons* and German *Lieder*. The thirty variations follow upon this.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Of the thirty variations, one in three is regularly a canon, and these canons progress in systematic order. Thus, the third variation is a canon in the unison, the sixth a canon at the interval of a second, the ninth a canon at the third, the twelfth at the fourth, and so on, until the twenty-fourth is reached, which is a canon at the octave, and the twenty-seventh a canon at the interval of a ninth. Of these canons, the twelfth and fifteenth variations, respectively, at the fourth and fifth, are in contrary motion—that is to say, the subject of the canon is answered by its inversion. There are other variations for which a special form is adopted. Thus, the tenth is a fughetta, the sixteenth an over-

## THE VARIATIONS

Their character, on command, was to be quiet and at the same time cheerful, the purpose being, not to induce sleep, but to hold the attention and enliven the sleepless hours. This is sufficient explanation of their object, which was not the mere display of skill. The ingenuities that are enumerated in the footnote below are wholly incidental to the structure and would not be noticed, let alone understood, by the ordinary listener. There is, in fact, a secret purpose or divine scheme behind the manifest and incredible beauties of this music, though that mystery does not, for a moment, interfere with the appreciation of the pieces or interpose itself into the fabric to the effect of any distortion of its surface. It is in motion under the apparent body, shaping things to their destined ends. Nothing is out of place in their predestined life; and it is as if the absolute control of their future is concealed so as to give them the illusion of liberty. It is the return of incident after incident to its parent that gives the fundamental pattern to this giant work; but the surface simplicity speaks of other things. The cosmogony or complete world that it presents is of human implication, alive with brave and manly feeling and domestic in contentment, though these truths turn to mystery, but never for too long. The end, not that ultimate scheme, but the religion of right and wrong, is never in doubt: it is implicit in every phrase. But it does not obtrude itself. The recreation of the mind more than its consolation was the object of this music. To this end, the variations with their inner echo of the theme had a self-content which no other musical form could have possessed. They were endlessly different, and yet so related that each section was another life, or another destiny fulfilled out of the

ture in the French manner, and the thirtieth, and last, is a quodlibet, a melody or potpourri of popular tunes heard over one another and, as it were, telescoped in double counterpoint. Cf. Edwin Evans, in his preface to the *Goldberg Variations*, played by Wanda Landowska, and published for the Bach Society by H.M.V.

It only remains to add that the *Goldberg Variations* were engraved in 1742 as the fourth part of the *Klavierübung*.

## THE WORKSHOP OF BACH

original. Each was perfectly shaped in itself and could be followed by ten or twenty of its family, so that in as many moments the scheme of life in all its generations was displayed before the mind. Nor was there finality at the close of this perspective, for the return of the theme collected, again, these different strands that it had emitted so that the end was like unto the beginning with all the future lying before it.

It is the tireless ingenuity of this work that prompted that fantasy upon the striking clocks. The variations must begin, like that, out of utter silence. They have been prepared with meticulous care for their special purpose, tried over and over again until their certainty was proved. The room in which they were written, with its various clavichords and keyed instruments, has some likeness to the clockmaker's shop. It is a workshop, that is alive at certain hours with the tuning of instruments and with phrases of music insistently repeated or, sometimes, allowed their fullness of life and played out to the end. This is midday or midnight, uninterrupted, and allowed to strike. More often than not it is silenced in the middle; or there is a pupil being given a lesson and practising his runs. And much of the work done is the carpentry of composing, the sawing and hammering and fitting before a note is sounded. It is only at long last that the piece is played, when everything is ready and the works are wound. It is even to be considered that over the mending and tuning of his instruments Bach had some approximation to the aforesaid Tompion, in the patience of his detail and in long deferment for assembly of material. The processes of work extended over months and years, while many projects matured together at one and the same time so that it may have been difficult to tell which of them would be finished first. Those giant schemes to fill the cold vessel of a church are inventions of the organ loft, conceived of at a height above the earth. They came into his mind in the tower, as it were, climbing into the wind and below the bells. The rushing, but ordered terror

## THE WORKSHOP OF BACH

of the giant fugue: the pleading tones of the passacaglia: the huge and rolling canon of the toccata, like the invention of a mathematical and fundamental ocean, after a moment miraculously calmed: the choirs that sing of the needle and the distaff, or entering at stated intervals, like timed actors, upon the scene descant the ordered universe and in the great body of their voices, edged with drums and trumpets, proclaim the universal laws: all of this formal architecture of the fugue builds itself into the Gothic or mediaeval vessel of the church and transcending those limitations inhabits that high and holy emptiness, chalk-white and mildewed in its stones, or standing in rose-red brick upon the Baltic plain. Such are his great and fundamental forms but he was at equal pains in miniature. He wrote little pieces, infinitely finished, for the manuscript book of his wife, Anna Magdalena. These will have been written from time to time, when inclination moved him, but these thirty variations which take three-quarters of an hour in performance, although of short length in themselves, are works of very different calibre from the moment or two of unconnected inspiration which is typical of that manuscript book and its miscellany of treasures. The variations form one of the most important sequences of thought in music, or poetry, or any of the arts. They have the intimacy, for their nocturnal purpose, of being alone with Bach while no one else is awake to listen, and they are sufficient in length to allow his thoughts and his personality to grow untrammelled upon the silence. The direction, once again, was that they should be of quiet and at the same time cheerful character, not in design of inducing sleep, but to hold the attention and enliven the sleeping hours.

There is semi-darkness, with as much light as a pair of candles will throw through an open door. He has got to the middle of the air or saraband, where it becomes resigned, an ineffable gentleness descends upon it which is comparable to the gloss of old or of the past through which we look upon things that were young and touching in their time, and then it fades

## TONES OF THE HARPSICHORD

and dies upon a sort of recitative of grace notes, the rushlike strewnings of its own elegance and gallantry. At once, comes the first of the variations, in quiet and cheerful contrast. Now the tones of the harpsichord with its two manuals have an analogy, where we cannot compare them to the flatness or sonority of any pianoforte, to an image in sound that will exactly describe their effect. The notes are not like a xylophone struck, not like an instrument of percussion, but the fingers sink down into the bed or core of the tone, this process being audible in all its gradations down to the toughening of the fibre: like the shutting of a little drawer, a little cabinet drawer beautifully fitted: like sap that hardens into the tree-heart: like, and this is it, the biting into a ripe apple. The ripe skin of it; the cells of its flesh that are honey sweet and deliciously cooled, as if by rain; the hardened core; and then the juice of all the apple, crushed out of the cells and quenching the throat and mouth; this is the pressing of those notes. Their taste is the staying of that sound after the hands are lifted. Its progressions are upon this honeyed sweetness with, again, a rattling or a drumming as of quills, as it might be the preening of quills up in the apple boughs, or a busy droning as of a shepherd's pipe, near by, in the shade. Such things are the foundation of its imagery: martial or elegiac; whether of domestic peace, of contentment in little rooms or of indefinable longing; in praise of death or, again, in military pomp as of pipeclay and the half mitre, or half sugarloaf, of the grenadier's cap; in virtuosity of spirit, displaying skill and strength, or upon the great stairs of fugue that climb and descend contrariwise, sometimes in double spiral so that the figurants pass and repass, but never meet.

Yet it is necessary to paint the scene in more precise colours. The effect of these incomparable inventions, played in the darkness, is to make a vicarious daylight that can be thrown where it lists, in a realism and a multiplicity of detail that could never be crowded into a day of life. And, here again, there is more than a day and more than a life in the three-quarters of an hour

## POTSDAM

that is the duration of this music. The cosmogony is complete in every detail; but, even so, things must not be imputed to it that it did not possess. Within five years of the time that this was written Bach was summoned to Potsdam by Frederick the Great.<sup>1</sup> 'When Frederick had just prepared his flute, in the presence of the whole orchestra, for the evening's concert, the list of strangers who had arrived was brought to him. Holding his flute in his hand, he glanced through the list. Then he turned round with excitement to the assembled musicians and, laying down his flute, said: "Gentlemen, old Bach is come." Bach, who was at his son's house, was immediately invited to the palace. He had not even time allowed him to take off his travelling clothes and put on his black court dress. He appeared with many apologies for the state of his dress, before the great prince, who received him with marked attention and threw a deprecating look towards the court gentlemen, who were laughing at the discomposure and numerous compliments of the old man. The flute concerto was given up for this evening; the King led his famous visitor into all the rooms of the palace . . . and the musicians accompanied the King and Bach from one room to another.' The scene of this unique interview between Bach and Frederick the Great was the palace of Sanssouci, which had been completed in this very year, 1747. It is already apparent, in the account just quoted, in the words of Bach's son, Wilhelm Friedemann, that Bach was considered to be excessively provincial and old-fashioned, a famous man but an ancient curiosity. He belonged to the past. The remark about his numerous compliments calls up a vision of his fulsome and old-fashioned manners, many provincialisms of bowing and bending the knee, and a suggestion of a deep and gruff voice, guttural, too, as only German voices can be. His figure was particularly conspicuous in this brand new French palace; glittering, even now, after two centuries have passed, but, then, in the full shimmer

<sup>1</sup>*Bach*, by C. F. Abdy Williams, pp. 90, 91, 'The Master Musicians Series', J. M. Dent & Sons, London, 1934.



## THE GIANT GRENADIER

of its silvered walls and in the orange and lemon, or red and green, gold of its gilding.

The only things of Prussia in Sanssouci were the plethora of military uniforms and the gigantic Quantz, six feet six inches in height, a mastiff of a man, who taught his master the flute, composed no fewer than three hundred flute concertos, and whose duty it was to listen attentively every evening while three out of this number were played in rotation, and at the end to criticize his master's performance.<sup>1</sup> That domiciled drill sergeant will have been in attendance upon this evening, following the King from room to room of the palace, at the head of his band of musicians and just behind Bach, to whom the King was intent on showing his collection of seven new Silbermann pianos and begging him to try them. Apart from the uniforms, and apart from Quantz, everything was French. The library was French, so was the furniture, and so was the very panelling of the walls. The room in which Voltaire was to work was already furnished and ready for him. On the wall of one of the saloons, where Bach may have seen it, hung Watteau's *l'Embarquement pour la Cythère*, lately bought by Frederick, and although it was painted as long before as 1717 presenting a contrast more complete than anything else that could be imagined to the works of this old man from the provinces. This contrast becomes more pointed still when we realize that the time at which this picture was painted, thirty years before, was the period of Bach's great organ works.<sup>2</sup> It will be seen that he was altogether inappropriate to this atmosphere. The age of rococo never touched him

<sup>1</sup>Johann Joachim Quantz, 1697-1773, was employed by Frederick the Great from 1741. The MSS. of 277 of his flute concertos are preserved in the Neue Palais at Potsdam. He also composed 200 flute solos, and dozens of trios and quartets, of which fifty-one are preserved at Dresden.

<sup>2</sup>The bulk of his organ music was written before his thirty-second year, most of it at Weimar between 1708 and 1717. All the six Fantasies, the three Fantasies and Fugues, the seven Fugues, the Passacaglia, the five Toccatas and Fugues, and all but five of the twenty-six Preludes and Fugues date from before 1717. Cf. *Bach*, by C. F. Abdy Williams, 'Master Musicians Series', J. M. Dent & Son, London, 1934.

## BACKGROUND OF BACH

in a single one of its implications. By the year of which we are speaking and, indeed, long before that, the taste of the age had passed him by. He was a living anachronism, a dusty old compendium of mediaeval learning. The rusty wheezing machinery of the fugue, that mediaeval monastic art, reposed in his person. It was known that he possessed inconceivable skill in counterpoint, and as a performer he was famous, but the new age, like our own, prided itself upon simplification and thought of Bach as needlessly prolix and redundant.

His genius was drawn from origins that were closed and dead to this new age of taste. It was because he was so deeply rooted into the antiquity of music, and so little ephemeral and of the moment, that his genius throws its shadow over the perpetual future as much as it resumes and epitomizes the past. Thus, he is of the seventeenth century more than he is of the eighteenth and, in his clavier music for instance, there are more echoes to be found of Byrd and of Bull,<sup>1</sup> composers who were unknown to him and who died sixty or eighty years before his birth, than there are prophecies, shall we say, of Mozart or of Chopin. This is, in part, because he gave expression to all the best of what had gone before him but, also, because his imagination must have run of itself into the selfsame direction. As in Shakespeare there are the punning allusions and verbal felicities that his age loved to play with, so in Bach the perspective and the visual calligraphy of music, its appearance in ink upon the page, its arithmetical poetry, the exploiting of its mathematical possibilities, all of these things are his technical or executive delight. They relate him into an earlier age; or it was that his Thuringian or provincial origin, far removed from the works of the Renaissance in all of the arts, except music, without architecture or painting or literature and, indeed, in point of the religious Reformation opposed in principle to such things, it was this remote provincialism of his origin that predisposed him towards the idioms of an earlier time. The visual world, for instance,

<sup>1</sup>William Byrd (1543-1623); John Bull (1562-1628).

## BACKGROUND OF BACH

was without strict classical architecture and modernity meant no more than the cumbersome barbarism of the German Renaissance. This is of portentous and unsurpassed elaboration. It is founded upon the Flemish style of the time, but before the Thirty Years War there was much money to be spent and patrons were not satisfied except with microscopic finish. The church and the castle at Bückeburg, the capital of the principality of Schaumburg-Lippe are the best examples of this prodigal labour. Both church and palace show the influence of the architect Wendel Dietterlin. This typical product of his age was born at Strasbourg in 1550, and died at Stuttgart in 1599. He was invited to the latter place by Duke Ludwig of Württemberg to build a pavilion, or Lusthaus. This was completed in 1593, and while at Stuttgart Dietterlin published his book upon architecture which ran into numerous editions and gave birth to a whole race of crowded and monstrous buildings. In fact, his work is a mass of 'conceits', in the poetical sense of the word, and the designs in his book and the buildings that his influence inspired should be considered with the poetry of the period. Our analogy becomes of more interest when we remember that critics of Bach compared him in 'elaboration to the forgotten poets, who were, it would seem, the near equivalents to Wendel Dietterlin. In fact, owing to the Thirty Years War, Germany showed no progress in any of the arts during the seventeenth century and a vigorous mind, born at the close of that time, while its experiments would point into the future would be forced, for its tradition, to return to the older Germany of a century before, to the age of Luther, Melanchthon and Pirckheimer. If the world that Bach saw with his eyes had no Palladio, no Mansart, no equivalent to Inigo Jones or Wren, no Corneille nor Racine, no Shakespeare, little or nothing Italian except in music, and if the Dutch were the artists and merchants of his northern world who adventured into the East and returned with something of its glamour upon them, then we can begin to define his visual world within its real limits. The im-

## THE CASE OF

proved architecture had no existence for him, neither had great drama, nor Italian painting. The Reformation had arrived but not the Renaissance. This Evangelical emptiness was only filled by music, which Luther, himself, had allowed. And, in the next generation during the civil war, the Swedish invasion and the excesses of the Imperialists had, between them, destroyed the prospects for the century that was to come. Thus we find the burgher Germany of the close of the seventeenth century, from which Bach sprang, to be still involved in the intricacies of a survived or superannuated Middle Ages. Where, among his immediate contemporaries, there was enterprise and experiment it was ever into the same direction of technical elaboration. If this is typical of the poetry it is no less true of any painters or designers of the time. Convincing instances of this are to be found in the books of Paulus Decker the Elder, more particularly the Kurfürstlicher Baumeister, published at Augsburg in 1711-1716. Decker had seen plans of Versailles, and he must have known the painted scenery of the Bibbiena family, but he performs a veritable *danse macabre* upon their corpses. It is a wild feat of the imagination, comparable in scale to the pictures of 'Mad' Martin but of a scientific exactness based on long architectural practice and therefore of a just and reliable fantasy. It is a wild prodigy of fire and labour, working together into an intoxication of architecture.

More extraordinary still, and affording us a more exact parallel to this sequence that we want to establish, are the books of Johann Jacob Schuebler. One of them is devoted in entirety to the merits of a combined bookcase and writing table that he had invented; but this is subjected to processes of technical treatment almost worthy of the Art of Fugue. The plates, which are engraved in minute and painstaking skill, with many plans in stipple, as elaborate as charts of the heavenly bodies in their convolutions, are so realistically done as almost to establish the actual turning round of the bookcase before our eyes. It is shown in nearly as many arcs of that circle as there may be



PLATE OF PERSPECTIVE FROM SCHUEBLER'S  
'PERSPECTIVA RES PICTURAE'



## JOHANN JACOB SCHUEBLER

stills in a film sequence. The fiendish difficulties of those plates are hardly credible. Every nicety of the ruler, working to scale, is elaborated into this terrific and desperate fantasy. It is the pattern of a long and intricate ballet set down, in simultaneity, upon a sheet of paper. Another of his pyrotechnical flights is concerned with the science of perspective. This work, published in 1719, with the curious title of *Perspectiva Pes Picturæ*, is concerned with actual and with shadow perspective. There is a mysterious plate that shows the shadow of a lamp falling upon the high and exaggerated consoles that are set against a wall. In other plates Schuebler stations himself in the apex of a dome, or along the high cornice, and gazes down into the giddy hollow. It rushes up towards him, distorted and dizzying, threatening death if he is dashed upon its stones. This inversion of the ordinary theme of perspective invites comparison with an identical process in the science of music. Perspective, with Schuebler, is a plaything and an obsession. It was as important in painting as the science of fugue in music. He dragged it in, for its own sake, and in his minor fashion performed prodigies of skill upon it. He has transcendentalized its purposes until it has become an end in itself. This is the defect and, at the same time, the merit of virtuosity in music. It is at this point that Bach approximates to Paganini and to Liszt; only in his case it was theoretical or scientific and not instrumental virtuosity. Schuebler, completely forgotten individual that he is, demonstrates the workings of the same spirit. He plays with his theme like a cat with a mouse, alternately cajoling and terrifying his victim. This inanimate scientific theory is turned and twisted inside out. But something more than the dry and dissecting mind distinguishes this obscure person. There is the touch of Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Terror* in this peculiar book. In his heavy and laborious way he is trying to be contemporary but he belongs to the dusty belfry, the black attic, the alchemist's laboratory of cobwebs and crucibles. He relates to a time when the work of the lamp was dangerous and reprehensible. Schuebler is a survival of mediaeval

## THE MARIENKIRCHE OF LÜBECK

methods. At the same time his technical mastery, which is a little prodigy, prevents his dismissal into a more distant past than the actual limits of his birth and death. He is, therefore, in little, an analogy that comes perfectly to hand. His old-fashioned provincialism is exactly what is needed in order to draw attention, by contrast and by similarity, to the situation of Bach in a world that had none of the background to which other countries, more fortunate than Germany, were accustomed. What was lacking in this has already been named, but the play of its disadvantages deserves some enquiry into the merits that it possessed.

In the old and Hanseatic town of Lübeck, so far into the Northern world that it faces upon Sweden and is the natural port from which to sail into the Baltic, there rises the high-pitched roof of the Marienkirche. It is a great building of brick, uncompromisingly Northern in its details, the triumph of a separate or Baltic school, with its vessel filled from floor to roof by the tombs of the merchants. It is as full of these as a ballroom is of mirrors; and something living of so many men and women who are dead and gone still attaches to the statue's silence so that it is not altogether the vault or charnel house. Their statues were set up in this hall to keep each other company and to wait together. It is, therefore, but the diversion of an hour in their long vigil when, sweet and dulcet, the celesta and the string of bells begin, not high in the tower, but low down from a hidden balcony. This proceeds in richness, but of nothing Eastern; more like the heavenly harmonies in a choir of angels, or so I heard it, thinking of an early picture. But this grows and swells in artifice, pealing more loudly, and of a sudden enriched again by the silver trumpets. They die away in a glissando of bells and new artifice begins of syrinx, clarion and shawm, of timbrel, gittern and shuddering cymbal. All the vessel of the church rings and echoes in the counterfeit. The tombs lose their terror and listen in contentment. It is the ringing of silvered armour: it is far off bells heard in the lonely wood when your feet are still: the blackest cherries, thick as starlings upon the trees, and



## BUXTEHUDE

pressed like wine to make a winter cordial: it is a prosperous wind in white sails and the slicing of the waters: tales of bright dresses and black faces: the voice from the high tower: painted wings of birds: the red gold globes upon the dark-leaf trees: exotic notes: and fading, dying, the little syrinx, little voice out of the reeds: so dies this organ on the air into the stillness of this empty church. It is the organ of Buxtehude.

In the autumn of 1705 Bach journeyed for more than two hundred miles on foot, from Arnstadt to Lübeck, in order to hear him. This Swedish composer had been organist at the Marienkirche since 1668, and Bach came to Lübeck on purpose to hear and study his style of playing. Every November and December he gave special evening performances of sacred music, both vocal and instrumental, with organ solos. It was because of this that Bach chose the late autumn for his visit. So enchanted was Bach by what he heard that he outstayed his leave of absence by three months, drawing down upon himself a severe reprimand from the consistory of Arnstadt on his return. It is even possible that he stayed on at Lübeck in the hope of succeeding to Buxtehude. But a condition of the appointment was that the new organist should marry his predecessor's daughter. Buxtehude had done this, himself, forty years before, but Bach was unwilling to marry a spinster ten years older than himself, and he relinquished the idea. When Bach came to Lübeck in that autumn Buxtehude was already nearly seventy years of age, having held the appointment, as we have said, since 1668. At once, therefore, this relates us to the mid-seventeenth century and Buxtehude, who was born at Helsingborg in Sweden, who lived in Denmark and at Lübeck and never travelled to the South, must have owed the tradition of his music not to Italy but to the Northern German and Netherlandish school. It is probable that the greatest name in his repertory and in the past to which he attached himself was that of Sweelinck (1562-1621), the Dutch composer and organist of the Old Church in Amsterdam. Besides the influences of his

## BUXTEHUDE

own compositions, Sweelinck taught so many organists of the next generation that his tradition must have come down unbroken to Buxtehude. This ancient, and it may be assumed ponderous individual, whom it is difficult not to think of in the imagination as the Doctor Bartolo of that sleepy old brick town, only a Doctor Bartolo with an ugly daughter for Rosina, this antique worthy had an influence upon Bach that gives freshness to his forgotten fame. The Passacaglia of Bach, his only composition in this form, is based upon the style of Buxtehude. It is among the master works of his giant period, the time of the Toccatas and of the Organ Preludes and Fugues, gigantic schemes upon a scale which has never been realized, we might say, in sculpture or in architecture, and which stand alone in the world beside a few works of poetry. If the Passacaglia had, indeed, its origin in this source, there is reason enough for listening to the organ upon which Buxtehude used to play. There is a living spirit still within the church that makes it different from most other churches. And the singing, in that full church, will have had more volume than the organ. It is not with the Bach cantatas in mind that we say this, but in thinking of the Chorales and the Chorale Preludes. The Chorale, or hymn to be sung by the congregation, was the most important point in the Lutheran service. Many of the Chorales were by Luther, himself, and it may be said that in them all the spirit of the Reformation breathes its independence, its sturdy defiance and its simple faith. These Chorales, dating mostly from the early sixteenth century, were the bedrock of Bach's inspiration. The churches were full to capacity, and everyone sang. Indeed, a fine in money and much scandal and gossip were incurred by absence from church services, which were also, we must remember, the only public entertainment of the time. No fewer than 319 of these Chorales harmonized by Bach are in existence, and many more must have perished. There are, as well, the Chorale Preludes, 143 in number, which were invented by Bach to serve as introduction to the hymns: many of them most

## BUXTEHUDE

elaborately diversified and forming important separate compositions in themselves, though based upon the more simple material that was to follow. These facts are sufficient proof of the religious nature of the background from which Bach took his origin. The Chorale was as important a part of his musical fibre as the Russian folksong to Mussorgsky. His inspiration, so far as that side of it was concerned, spoke in the language of the sixteenth century. His genius empowered him to raise a more imposing edifice upon those ancient foundations. All of his journeys undertaken in order to hear the works of living men older than himself, and the trip to Lübeck was no isolated instance of this practice on his part, only served to relate him further into that fugal past. At the same time, he had the keenest anticipation of his own contemporaries. He procured, and copied, all the music by Vivaldi that he could lay his hands upon. This Venetian composer tallies in time almost exactly with Bach, his dates being 1670-1743. It is probable that he was the living musician of whom Bach held the highest opinion. Neapolitan music does not seem to have come so much into his notice. Vivaldi, in any case, was a Northern Italian composer and the more theatrical forms of the South will not have appealed to Bach as they did to Handel, who passed the most receptive years of his life in Italy and learnt the Italian operatic style that he was to carry later on, with no permanent success in that vein, to England. Vivaldi has a toughness and a classical closeness of texture that are serious in the extreme; and his influence could be proved, perhaps, in every instrumental work undertaken by Bach, more particularly in the concertos for violin and for clavier, the proof of which contention is in the number of Vivaldi concertos copied out by Bach and adapted to that end. The date of these transcriptions is, generally speaking, the decade after 1730. Vivaldi, by that time, was already close upon sixty years of age; so that it was no daring innovation on the part of Bach to copy out the works of a man fifteen years older than himself. Vivaldi represented the current class-

## THE FUGAL UNIVERSE

ical pabulum; and it is, perhaps, not fanciful to trace his influence in the group of works that we have mentioned but not, assuredly, in the Brandenburg Concertos which date from an earlier period (1721) and seem more Northern in feeling. And yet, in their day, the Brandenburg Concertos were works of bold experiment, but this was no Italian classicism. Bach may have had Lully and the court composers to Louis XIV in mind when he wrote the six works in question, but they speak of Brandenburg, of the Pomeranian plain, and of provincial notabilities born to local importance long before the beginning of the eighteenth century.

It is necessary to stress the fact that when Bach experimented into the future it was not the course of the eighteenth century that he pursued, but his steps took him into a fugal Utopia. The Art of Fugue, the Musical Offering, and the more gigantic of his organ works are the proofs of this. When his motive was a religious one, in the B minor Mass and in the best of the Cantatas, for example, the emotion of the words drew him away from pure abstraction. His inspiration, then, seems to be founded upon a miraculous synthesis of the sounds of words, of their musical and onomatopoeic properties, and upon intuition of their spiritual meaning transmuted, on the instant, into music. In this way, a weight that no form of speech could ever attach to words, is used by him to underline and exalt their meaning. An easy instance of this occurs in the B minor Mass, in the Et In unum duet for women's voices, where the simplicity of the three short words is fructified out of its own sound into something that partakes of a homily upon their meaning, and a soaring flight, rising and falling in exaltation with the words. The Sanctus, again, has the holiness of that word's import, which is given like the sound of indrawn breath and, with it, the motion of a swinging censer but upon a scale comparable to that silver *botafumeiro* which is so heavy that it is lowered from the roof, above the altar in Santiago da Compostela, and swung from side to side by a rope, or an iron chain. A closer

## THE FUGAL UNIVERSE

acquaintance with the Cantatas would yield hundreds of illustrations of his genius for blending the sound of words with their spiritual meaning. The huge fugal choruses, which would seem to reach to the ends of formal music and to leave no possibility untried, he may have regarded as works of illustration rather than of pure creation. They dictated their own shapes, demanding certain treatment and none other. He had to carry meaning with him into the highest altitudes of this formal architecture, and the prejudices of faith would naturally demand other designs than those appropriate to sheer mathematics. This purer or more lyrical form, if that term can be applied to anything upon so tremendous a scale as the works in question, is to be expected of him, as would be the case were he a poet, in youth and in old age. This is the exact truth where he is concerned, for it occurs in the organ works that he wrote before his thirty-second year and in the Art of Fugue and the Musical Offering upon which he was employed in the very last years of his life. The Art of Fugue, the orchestral dressing of which is now fairly familiar to English audiences owing to several recent performances, has a cumulative and mounting drama which makes of it one of the most moving experiences imaginable. The knowledge of the incredible structures underlying its apparent surface, and perhaps none but working musicians can appreciate their full import, is even no part of this drama. The reiteration of those giant patterns until, apparently, the hand of death strikes him down just before the final terrible climax, this is the drama. By no extension of the imagination can this work be called anything but terrible, for it beats upon the senses like the pains of birth. It is some process that has got to accomplish itself, and it fails at the very lips of success. And yet, this most grinding and striving of all epical things, just through its fanatic character, its uncompromising seriousness, belongs to the lyrical period of his life, to a time when he would think of nothing but the pure poetry of his gift. In it, he was purged of all extraneous things, and his imagination took wing

## THE FUGAL UNIVERSE

and soared into regions that he had never touched since his youth. The mighty works of his Glanz Periode, written for the organ, and therefore for himself alone, are the parallel. In spite of the fact that they are only intended for the organ, and are tainted with sacrilege when transferred to the orchestra, such titanic, giant abstractions transcend their own limits and become pure music, not the music of an instrument. In them, Bach soared above the heads of his audience, or played to himself in an empty church. Their inspiration comes out of a mechanical figure, out of a handful of notes, into the picture of terror, of pleading and supplication; into the certainty of death to all living things; or a beating and flapping of creation's wings, a rushing and appalling wind blown to the four quarters of the world; images of the elements, of fire and ice, the teeming earth and the empty seas. There are rushing fugues, like figures clothed in fire, like Greco's *Breaking of the Seven Seals*: fugues that postulate divine intercession and prove it like a mathematical problem: fugues that soar in the empyrean and never descend upon earth: fugues that begin in supplication and end with the prayer granted: fugues that are colder than the vault of dead bones and that only deal in mortification and the hand of death: and fugues that are a triumph above the touch of human hands and are spoken by the trumpet in tremendous emphasis, sustained till the triumphant end. The pleading of the Passacaglia; the giant Toccatas, solved and fortified in their fugal epilogues; such are his giant or anarch works, greater in scale and accomplishment than any other works of man and written by him whom we compared, in his little moments of exquisite perfection, to the meticulous care and miniature chiming of the clock shop. It is no derogation, if they have issued from the same crucible and passed the same tests of craftsmanship.

The Goldberg Variations occupy a particular and unique place in this vast output. It is not only their length that makes them important, for the great Chaconne for violin solo is of

## THE FUGAL UNIVERSE

nearly these dimensions. But the Variations were composed for so special a purpose that they have a style and a significance outside the scope of any of his other works. Exceptional pains went to their perfection; and, in thinking of this, it must be realized that they were composed, with no view to publication, for the ears of one person alone, and even, we may think it probable, in prospect that the manuscript would be lost or destroyed before many years had gone by. He was well rewarded for the work, as we know, but this was uncertain beforehand, and was a consideration that would have had, in any case, no effect whatever upon a man of Bach's character. The purpose and opportunities involved must have made their appeal to him. It was to be a recreation for the intellect and the imagination, not a sedative nor a soporific. Also, the fact that it was to be listened to in solitude gave it peculiar point. The thirty variations, a generous number, were sufficient for the work not to be readily and immediately grasped in the mind. They were to last for years and not be the novelty of a moment. To this end, the inner workings of the scheme gave to its secrets a miraculous permanence lying behind and below its surface beauties. The engine of the machine displayed its workings but did not seek to explain them, leaving their mystery ever open and unsolved. A slighter texture, as in Mozart's many sets of variations, would have begun to pall so soon as the first exquisite delicacies became familiar. Months later they might be taken up again, but night after night they would lose their freshness and their spontaneous fancy. Nothing in the nature of an improvisation could hold the attention, for the mind, after a time, would be seeking for faults and would only find its satisfaction in the defeat of those efforts.

We must, now, attempt an interpretation of these nocturnal purposes. The Variations were not contrived in order to display physical or mental virtuosity. In the case of the only other set of variations by his hand, in the little-known organ prelude to the Chorale 'Himmel, hoch', the object of Bach was to demonstrate

## THE FUGAL UNIVERSE

his canonic skill. It is one of his final works, related to the Art of Fugue and the Musical Offering, not to be included in any easy category of ornament and pleasure. It belongs to his last, lyrical or Utopian, phase. With the Goldberg Variations the point and circumstance are otherwise. They are personal and not impalpable. Their object was to interest a sleepless mind while all else slept. This consideration, alone, makes them unique among works of art, for they exist in a solitude where the other breathing forms lie near to them, but in another, or sleeping world. If the imagination of Bach lies awake, also, in this nocturnal silence it is a more realistic survival of his immortality than any other contact with his mind. We find ourselves alone with him for nearly an hour until the music ends. It is the dead of night, but none of the distortions of night stalk in the darkness. The sleepless, who toss and turn in the false perspective of their thoughts, do not know this alleviation but lie in continual torment oppressed by their daily worries, which are drawn out and magnified in the dark.

This music, then, is a picture of the day in all the clearness and sanity of its light. It is no less than the comforting thought of that light in a world of sleeping men and women. Thus the darkness is not of death but a transitory and passing obscurity of no substance, and ordained to lighten. It is in the nature of things and no part of terror. But the trancelike stillness of this state is a dark glass in which the world shows clear. It is the silence of reflection and not of slumber. This is the opportunity in which to relate things to their true proportion so that night becomes the comfort of day. There is never a moment for this in the stir of light.

The houses are streets of Goslar, or of Dinkelsbühl, high-gabled, with a granary for attic. It is a timber architecture, carved and painted like the houses of Hildesheim. Beyond the walls, the greensward or the goose-plain stretches. From that green monotony, high, high the gables cluster; it is a crowded market all in steeple hats, or the high keels of wooden ships



## THE FUGAL UNIVERSE

abuilding.\* And then the chequered surfaces, the flowered window boxes; the marigolds, the candytuffs, the cornflowers and the pelargoniums. Each flower is the day in miniature, the petalled heat and countless eyes of heaven. Bright and brave colours flaunt upon the air. There is poetry in every farm cart; while blacksmith or wheelwright, at Vulcan's forge, tends the red snapdragon and shape the fire.

Each house has a fruit-tree: sweet-sap apple, sleepier pear, black cherry, luscious plum. The hop-poles and the malt make one. The dusty miller brings his mealy flour. Winter is over. Woodstacks are low and there is hardly need for fire. Orchard enchantment has begun its dreams. Order, and sanity and Sunday come. This is their life. It is not rich, nor poor. There is money to save and every parlour has its purse of gold. Best suits are taken out and worn for gala. The church bells ring. There is manly singing, the solemn organ, wise sleep, and then the busier Monday comes. It is contentment: but we never know that, now.

Their god was a husbandman who led them out to harvest. The gold heads nod again. They shake the trees for apples, and they store the sticks for fuel. It is autumn and the bonfire smoulders. These are days of gathering till the beams are reached. There is nothing wasted. Everything is garnered. But the evenings lengthen at the window pane. The world is white and silent. It is snowing fast. The wet wood purrs upon the hearthstone. Men and women shake the snow from them. In his accustomed corner the dachshund, with splayed foot, turns and turns the meat spit. And so the seasons come and go.

Life had purpose, and monotony. And there were ends in view. It was contentment to think your life was given you for this. Illusory beauty had no reason in that world in order. There was harmony in little things. The clock chimed and only grey-heads sighed. And, one fine morning, music played along the gabled street. The family of musicians came into the town.

## THE FUGAL UNIVERSE

Once a year they gathered and, in the evening, sang old songs. It was the quodlibet. The robust redcoat and the drinking song, the peasant song and love song, like the year's four seasons played in one. And, then, once more, the sarabande for end to this soft music, silence and the snuffing of the candle flame.



## IV THE BANQUET, OR CENACOLO

### 3. Ballet *(dedicated to the muse of Tchaikowsky)*

There is a rap upon the desk and the music begins. We have entered the world of dance and mime. The curtain is not yet risen; but, from the start, its illusions are fore-shadowed out of this darkness that is traditional to the overture and statement is made of that stage existence, at once improbable and real.

Soon a haunting, androgynous air is in full wing upon the orchestra, unchecked, with new direction lent to it by an unexpected turn or panorama in the music. Again, it is caught up and made emphatic by the brass; and at once returns fortified and given in final form with plangent, chromatic runs upon the horns and trumpets and a shadowy orchestration, as of shadows in the water, upon the flutes and hautbois. It is the dance tricked out in all its steps. We know, from now onwards, what to expect; and the coda, climax or apotheosis of the dance, mounts and mounts, delays and again delays, lifted now out of its human, anthropomorphic meaning into a tremendous flourishing or preluding before the curtain. Thrills or shivers of delight traverse the whole gamut of the instruments; while the wild and deep flickerings of this simulated lightning foretell the deep passions of the coming illusion, its fulminating importance and the doubled or stilted drama of the classical dance. Wonder after wonder is foretold in the music; which, at last, with an ascending fanfare, four times blown to the four winds, above

## MAZURKA SOLENNELLE

the rolling of the drums, proclaims the parting of the heavy curtains and the empty stage is seen, blazing in a galaxy of lights and painted with lofty porticos and a gigantic stairway.

It is the threshold or great landing of Caserta, with its stairway climbing yet higher than the reality, only of an architecture more fanciful and ornamental for this purpose of display; but, before the eyes can seize every intricacy of this painted emptiness, to the measure of a mazurka and holding hand in hand, the dancers come out, pair after pair from the wings, and in slow cortege or procession make the whole round of the scene, bending alternately each knee as in ceremony of the court. More and more dancers fill the stage. A second tour of the precincts accomplishes itself upon the music so that each pair of dancers can reach to its appointed place in the throng, while a few flourishes, like the imperious gestures of a hand, end the dance in triumph just as it began. Next, and without pause, comes the presentation of each dancer by her partner. To a slow music of display the five ballerinas turn round in the men's arms who wait for and support them, outstretched as though to catch them in a simulated falling. They turn rapidly upon their points, with the rustling of their five dresses heard above the music; which, then, quickens into fiery intensity while the men, like released springs, leap spinning into the air behind their partners, giving the lie to the effeminacy of their flaxen wigs. Higher and higher they leap, touching the earth only to rebound and spin in rivalry, while the music in its passion advances the whole body of the dancers right up to the footlights, working them to a crescendo or climax of this spinning and leaping. They rise and fall upon the wings of the music. It hovers and achieves flight: it sustains them in their levitation above the boards for the space of the coda or climactic: and, then, in triumph dies in full strength of its assertion, so that they come to earth with arms outstretched for applause, claiming their right to it in the exultation of the music. So it ends, and the serious business of the dance begins. .

## ENTRY OF PRINCE CHARMING

But, first, the trumpets flourish again, echoing and re-echoing along the corridors into the wings of the theatre, as if to the wide-flung doors of the banqueting hall from which a procession now approaches. It is the prince of the fairy story and his mother, many courtiers and all the figurants of the ballet, those who only stand still in order to give reality to the painted background and are but supernumeraries of the dance. The prince and his mother, hand in hand, ascend the steps of the throne and now all the conventions of the classical dance are fulfilled. That fictitious world is made complete by an audience within itself and by the stage travesty of those imperial masters for whom this entertainment was devised. Since the dance is their delight it is no more than the ordinary existence of their servitors.

No sooner are the prince and his mother seated upon their thrones than to music of tinkling delicacy, of Papageno plumage, there appears the *Fée Dragée*. The door of a crystal cage has been opened for her, or so it would seem, and she comes out like a figure that dances before the clock, at the striking of the hour.

Stealing in softly, and always on her points, she comes to the front of the stage with a run of little steps, a clocking, clocking of her ballet shoes. It is the blunted toes of these that make this hammering and that raise her into her element of air; and, at once, the glockenspiel, the glissando or little tower of bells, begins. She is the *Fée Dragée* or sugarplum: sugar almond and smooth sultana of my fancy. Her dancer's dark hair is combed forward into a little tufted fringe that juts out over her forehead. This draws and enlarges her eyes, which shine like green water in the light; while the tuft, above, gives justification to the tilt of her nose and to her smiling mouth, for this is the tarta travesty of the ballroom, the *Ecossaise*, in her own medium of the dance. Her tuft of hair makes her into a *houri* or little Muslim: but the music, which does not allow of this, denies the Orient and insists upon the ballet skirt. This is of white or pink,

## THE FIVE VARIATIONS

with lattice of black lace and jet upon it. The back of her hair is in a cap of net, like the dancers of Cadiz; only their more nervous fire is lessened into dalliance by the cool poetry of her appearance and by that pagoda of little bells. Her matchless legs are like the instruments of this music, the very strokes of the campanella. But there is no time for more. The music dies. The enchantment is over almost as soon as it began.

This is only first of the five variations. It would be impossible to describe them all in detail. Their music, which in universal experience is the earliest music heard in childhood and the last forgotten, will be known to everyone who reads these pages. For myself, I first heard it at Monte Carlo in that most lovely of theatres, all mirrors and gilding, as theatres should be. When I add that I was five years old; that it was Christmas Day; that I had never ridden in a motor car before that morning; and that this was my first visit to a theatre, as well as my first hearing of an orchestra, enough has been said to account for the fixation of certain ideas and associations in my mind, ever since.<sup>1</sup> We can, therefore, returning once more to our own theme, let pass the next dance in our delight of recognition until we come to the *Danse des Mirlitons*, or dance of the reed-pipes, for this is of the same order of genius. It exists, as it were, in an Orient of its own imagining which, away from the stage, is illusory and unreal. Its inhabitants, for the space, perhaps, of this moment, are neuter beings, compact of the beauties and virtues of both sexes. I find it impossible to personify this dance as I did the *Fée Dragée*. But it is definitely of green reeds or rushes, of green rushes growing where there was snow and frost, not long ago. The *Danse des Mirlitons*, because of that synonym of pipes and

<sup>1</sup>I was to hear it played many times, later on, but still in early childhood, when walking by the sea, or upon the Spa at Scarborough. Those pavilions were of a fanciful architecture, not incomparable to that Casino by the blue Mediterranean. Many curious, seaside characters were the inevitable accompaniment to this music; and these things, taken together, may have had as powerful an effect upon my imagination as the domes of Brighton Pavilion upon Aubrey Beardsley, who passed his childhood in that place.

## PAS DE TROIS

reeds, evokes the phantoms of the water bank and speaks in voices of sweet waters, little madrigals and snow-white shapes of snow. The sublimation or synthesis of this is carried to the theatre boards and left for the dancer to interpret. The swaying, flower-dropping measures of the other instruments seem to shed their petals where the flutes or reeds, or where the dancer treads. The flutes have, even, a hieratic, an incense-swinging rhythm. But it is so familiar to the ears and so unlike anything else in experience that, again, it passes by before the mind can do more than wonder at this miracle of invention. There is another variation, that of the *Fée des Lilas*, which used to be danced inimitably by Nijinska; a rushing, impetuous dance like a tree violently shaken in the wind; like the tree, herself, tearing off her blossoms and throwing them to the earth; or, even, like the personification of that wind among the loaded boughs; and then comes what is, after the *Fée Dragée*, the most beautiful of the variations.

This is announced by a fanfare, which lingers for long in the memory; and the figures of the *pas de trois*, a girl and two men who should be dressed as harlequins, come on leaping in great strides. Their hands are linked in hers and they lift the girl like a lock of thistledown between them. It is the *Fée Dragée*, who has had time to change her clothes, and is now a columbine, but of snow and pastel shades. Their music is in waltz-time; but how can it be called a waltz? It is languorous and desperate: and so epitomizes the dance in every beauty that pertains to the art that we have to regard this as the climax or climacteric of dancing. By some miracle of genius there is expressed in the music the lightness and loveliness that the harlequins have to carry. It is implied that her leaps cannot reach to the height of theirs; that, with their arms to help her, she can float higher than their heads; and that, since she has not one suitor but two, her heart is not yet bestowed, nor heavy in apprehension. Also, this is theatre within a theatre. Columbine and her pair of harlequins, in the leaping that is traditional to their character, have a

## MIME

doubled or reflected authenticity. Her fringe of hair is hidden in the cocked hat that she is wearing, but at her neck there is the columbine's frill for foil to her smile. Even so, before there is time to hold the music once more in mind, to feel the warmth of that smile and look down from it to her sparkling legs, the harlequins who have made a round of springs or leaps apart from her and independently, so as not to draw her fire, come near to her and coalesce, and the four notes of the coda or termination leave her riding upon their shoulders taking the plaudits, upon which all three run out in a series of leaps and the dance is done.

There must be a respite: and that ancient art of mime, the speech of dance where this other was the song, now has its moment. It is performed to a long and cadenced air; the thrones are left empty and the prince and his mother descend into the throng. This is the ritual of the Mass; and to the balletomane its liturgical movements are no less interesting than the figures of the dance. It is their formalized speech for, as in the recitative of an opera, the persons dwelling in this galaxy of light cannot let fall their hard-won convention to the point of talking in ordinary words.

The prince is led up by his mother to the line of maidens. She asks him to take his choice of them, but the *Fée Dragée* in a dozen different disguises has ensnared his soul and he will not so much as look at these others, turning aside, even, as if he preferred the company of his friends and boon companions. The changing moods of this long-drawn melody are made to express proposal and rejection in a romantic rise and fall of tones. To those who love this thing, the open or Italian air to which this is mimed is instinct with the poetry of these stilted beings. It is in keeping with the romantic youth that he should refuse upon the wings or volutes, as it were, of this nostalgic melody which encloses not only his own sentiments but the portrait of his obsession. The pleadings of her beauty are imprisoned in it, and she is imploring him to lift the spell that has fallen upon her. A



## THE FOUR QUARTERS OF THE WORLD

fact of mutual assistance is depicted in the music; or so it might be possible to interpret this melody to which he mimes his irresolution while his mind is determined upon her capture and the tune, itself, is redolent of romantic longing. It is of no avail: his mother's advice is not heeded by him, and turning sadly away she is led by his hand into the wings, followed by her women. But the prince comes back again to join his friends. The old tutor, a character who has not appeared before this moment, is given a short comedy air to which he dances with cracking limbs; the prince drinks with his companions from cardboard goblets; and a final cracoviak or polonaise of fiery accent brings us to the curtain.

Such, in brief, is one act of the great or classical tradition. It is, even, speaking from its detail, typical only of the first act before the unfolding of the story. But, from now onward, we breathe its haunting and nostalgic delights and to that extent are participant as well as audient. The stage direction tells us only 'en Allemagne, dans le temps fabuleux des Contes' as an indication of place and period.<sup>1</sup> The castellan need be of no more importance in the drama than the prince's old tutor, until we remember that in Poland, the plain of cracoviak and polonaise, the castellans were the greatest nobles of the kingdom. This world of wonders is not to be attached to any one time or place. If it has these undertones, this wind which blows continually bringing echoes of cracoviak or mazurka out of the plain, it has, also, the trepak and hopak of the peasants, the kosatchok, the terek and lesghinka of the Circassians, and the dance of buffoons or clowns in flaxen wigs and patched clothes like knaves from a pack of cards, who leapfrog and land upon each other's shoulders, who make play of their Russian boots and take the applause of the evening. It is a dance of bassoons, the bumpkins of the orchestra; and this may be followed by a tarantella or the Gaditanian castanets. This cosmos of the dance which the genius of one man sustains in being, if, therefore, it is to be at-

<sup>1</sup>The stage direction for *Le Lac des Cygnes*.

## THE FOUR QUARTERS OF THE WORLD

tached in any sense whatever to that direction of *'le temps fabuleux des Contes'* is only to be related to that other cosmos, existing in its authentic and necessary environment, the ceiling of the great stairway at Würzburg. Here, the genius of Tiepolo created an entire world that is comparable in copiousness and variety to this spectacle of which we are witness. In dimension alone it must be the greatest area ever covered by the invention of a painter. Its subject is Olympus and the four continents or quarters of the world. Each continent has one long cornice of the ceiling to itself, while Olympus fills the airy void between them. The four friezes are worked into every conceivable variation upon costume and nationality, comparing, in this, with the subsidiary or character dances of the ballet. Europe has the reindeer and Laplander of the North; vineyard husbandmen of Italy or Spain; dark-haired peasant women or fair daughters of the gondolier in short, striped petticoats; façades of fine buildings; snow-white oxen garlanded with flowers; a weeded river god with his urn, Triton of sweet waters; and the prince bishop's court, a microcosm in itself, with its wigged notaries and halberdiers, its dwarfs and its green-liveried huntsmen. America, the plumed Indies, has its feathered men and women; parrots and macaws; gilded caciques or alguacils and the silver mines of Potosi; Africa, its men of ebony or basalt; fine turbaned negresses and pyramids of Cheops; and, Asia, its silk-clad merchants; pagodas or towers of bells; porcelain vases, bales of silk and kegs of pearls; the Indian elephant and his castle; and familiar turbaned Turk, the Dalmatian of the quays of Venice.

We have said that the airy void between these friezes, or the air above their heads, is Olympus of the gods and goddesses. These open spaces are to be compared with the great airs of the dance, when the centre of the stage is left free for their movements. The clouds, or white stallions that draw the chariots, correspond to those moments when the dancer makes her entrance riding upon the shoulders of her partner, or even carried like a goddess by the outstretched arms of her retinue. Tiepolo

## THE CLOUDY KINGDOM

has painted this intermediate heaven, this hinterland of the air, with white cloud-forms and limb-revealing spaces, bastions of cirrus showing braided heads and smooth shoulders in the sky. The azure of the air has this wingless population, but it is to be remarked that his goddesses are fair-haired and dancers must be dark. Hair like a raven's wing is their equivalent for that golden-haired daughter of the gondolier who was model for Tiepolo. And yet there is most apt comparison between his Olympus and our subject, for his clouds are like our lights of the stage. The blazing footlights are the steady play of his sunlight, darting in visible beams across the empyrean, while the clouds in isolation and alone are the suddenness of light from the wings as it falls upon a dancer and, indeed, the whole refulgence of his painted sky corresponds to the illumination, to the light of golden water that is our delight and glory in the theatre. It is these beings, dwelling in the light, and different or doubled when they are away from it, who hold the imagination and because they are creatures of flesh and blood and not only and for ever the goddesses of a painted sky, live in a realism that lies behind the poetry of their profession. This mirrored or doubled existence, this truth, if it is truth, within that echo, is the romance or glamour that attaches to them. It is for this that there is ever the crowd at the stage door. And so would there be could the goddesses of Tiepolo come down from their clouds.

Meanwhile, by substitution of image, as if this view of Olympus was the interval between the acts, we hear again the great open airs of Tchaikowsky and find the empty stage preened and set ready for the dance. The lights of the theatre, alone and uninhabited, are burning in all their illusory brilliance, soon to be remembered as such when we tread the Stygian shore and breathe the yellow vapour or miasma of the prison house. But, as yet, there is no hint of this. The prince and his companions have come back from hunting in the woods; and, while this romantic prelude fills the stage, there is the beat of wings in the music and a flight of wild swans passes overhead across the even-

## THE MUSE OF TCHAIKOWSKY

ing sky. And, having said this, we sublimate all the acts, for it is the ballet of Tchaikowsky that is our theme and not any particular scene out of the three ballets that he composed. Instead, it is an interior scene, common, as it were, to all three of them. The virtuositities of the dance are, now, to be displayed. But our nostalgia is not yet heightened enough to be able to materialize that form in whose shape we shall interpret its wonders. For it has certainly nothing of Tiepolo in its physical appearance. We must, therefore, banish the Venetian simile from our minds.

Tchaikowsky, whose inner life is less known to us than that of any other artist who has lived during the last century, imposes other images upon us than the personalities of that painter whom we have only mentioned because he is comparable to Tchaikowsky in fullness and copiousness of creation. Other men are better known as to the facts of their lives than Tchaikowsky because the details are ascertained, or for the reason that there is nothing in the least remarkable to notice. It is not so with Tchaikowsky. The problem of his mind must be the most interesting of all those that have, up till now, and with mercy, eluded the psychologist. It would seem as if he was unable to evoke an image unless it moved in terms of the dance. The supreme moments in his music are linked inevitably to that convention. He was only happy when his music moved in travesty, this is as true of *Romeo and Juliet*, of *Francesca da Rimini* and of his symphonies, as it is of his ballet music. Tchaikowsky, and we know enough of him from reading his letters to be able to say this, was outside life, debarred by his limitation of nerves, by his shyness, by his self-pity, and by other and deeper reasons, from leading the life of an ordinary normal being. The strange story of his marriage and much other evidence is in support of this assumption. There was a space or a proscenium between himself and all other beings with whom he wished to establish contact. This empty no man's land was the field in which his music flourished. It was the cloud between himself and his pursuers; but, also, the objects of his fancy dwelt upon the far side

## THE MUSE OF TCHAIKOWSKY

of that barrier, and they were more certainly unattainable since even their existence was only an illusion. It was deception; and yet not actual illusion but the art of illusion. They were its practitioners: and in their own lives they might be nearly unrecognizable compared with their hieratic or liturgical selves. No contact was possible with them in their life of travesty; and, behind that, it could be assumed that they were ordinary human beings, not to be approached by him, for that reason alone. His own inaccessibility found in this, the excuse or cliché for its romantic exaggerations. This was the sop to his self-pity and, also, the steed or Pegasus of his muse.

He was spurred by it into the most intense realism of execution. This is no dreamy poetry, but practical music for dancing of a brilliance and force which has no parallel in its kind. No other musician has understood this metier as did Tchaikowsky. Neither in the melodic line of Bellini, nor in the dramatic genius of Verdi, is there a more complete identification of purpose and practice. Tchaikowsky wrote as inimitably for the dance as did Liszt for the pianoforte. Nor are his apt and vigorous terminations, which are the signature, as it were, that he sets upon his character dances, the true measure of his greatness. Any set dance, taken in isolation from one of his ballets, is overwhelming proof of that excellence, which is as complete and all-sufficient in itself as if the whole of this classical art was concerned with his one name alone. But it is in the slow vehicles for the dance, those open airs which are the platform for its pyrotechnics, that the real degree of his genius is apparent. Not yet is our mounting credulity ready for that moment of creation.

But the airs of mime are scarcely less remarkable; and they are to be recognized in his symphonic music as well. What else than this is the adagio of his Fifth Symphony, so familiar to everyone from the ballet of *Les Présages*? This is mime and not dance, however much the choregraphic genius of Massine may convince us to the contrary. Another instance of mime to be

## MIME IN MUSIC

found in his symphonic music is in the air that appears halfway through his *Hamlet*. This is, once again, the theatre. It is a stage reverie or a stage farewell; but, while this is instinct of the foot-lights, it is ballet and not opera, and miming but not dancing. This is the true nostalgia; and it is the essential Tchaikowsky, a quality which he possesses and that is to be found nowhere else. Anyone who has heard this air will know it at once in its implications. All that it requires for its interpretation is the raised curtain. Even an empty stage would give the key to his meaning. The melody has a hurried, impatient tread, a harassed curiosity; it is searching for something, looking into the wings and running from back to front of the boards; it has a portamento, a carriage or poise which creates its own convention as it proceeds and evokes, as only Tchaikowsky has power to do, the opportunities and illusions of the ballet. Nor, by confusion of the imagination, could this tune be imputed to any but a male dancer. The sexes are as sharply defined in his tunes as they are in certain trees or flowers. For instance, the music for the *Fée Dragée* is incontestably feminine in character, while that of the *pas de trois*, described a little way back, is predominantly masculine but with a feminine burden or import, there being two harlequins and columbine concerned. This differentiation is no less apparent in mime than in dance. To many persons these stilted movements may seem old-fashioned and ridiculous, like a faded and outworn eloquence. But it is only with their aid that the convention of dance may be maintained without a break in its logic. These glorified beings cannot descend to ordinary speech. Neither is it credible that for the space of an entire evening they can do nothing but dance. There is no plot that could bear the strain of so rigorous an application of its purpose and, in the result, it would be no more than a string of episodes or *divertissements*. Mime is, therefore, a necessity; but, also, it is the medium of beauties that, perhaps, only the combined talents of a Tchaikowsky and a Petipa have brought to perfection. The long and cadenced airs which

## DOCTOR COPPÉLIUS

Tchaikowsky wrote to the detailed instructions of his choreographer are the most apt vehicles ever made to these ends of expression. Their derivation is not difficult to determine.

The models taken by Tchaikowsky for his ballet music were Adolphe Adam and Delibes. Such airs are certainly a part of the fabric of *Giselle*; and, particularly, that one which is associated with the heroine during her madness might have come straight from the pen of Tchaikowsky. As for Delibes, it is well known that Tchaikowsky held him in the highest possible admiration. He compares his own *Lac des Cygnes* to *Coppélia* much to the detriment of his own work, of which he says he is thoroughly ashamed. And the number and variety of the open tunes in *Coppélia* is, in truth, most amazing. The very first bars of the first act begin with that familiar mimosa-laden waltz. *Coppélia*, which was produced at the Paris Opera on 25 May 1870, only a month before Sedan, is like the last flowering of the Second Empire, the only work of art produced by that system during the decade of the 'seventies. It is, therefore, in a sense, a prophecy of what might have been had the Empire not collapsed in disaster. The invention of these seemingly facile tunes was, it would seem, no less than a torture to Delibes; but no one would think this on hearing the music. It moves in a flowing and spontaneous ease. But not even the complications of its plot, not the idiosyncrasies of Doctor Coppélius, nor the metamorphoses of Coppélia and the doll can divert the period interest of the music. That mimosa-laden waltz transfers the action to the south of France and we see, in imagination, the new Rue des Lilas or Avenue des Citronniers, the blue sea, the striped awnings and the parasols. It does not matter if there comes a mazurka or a Bohemian polka; the palm-shaded Riviera is circumscribed in this music. The spontaneity of the tunes, that never need brushing and are perennially fresh and flower scented after nearly seventy years have gone by, causes *Coppélia* to be one of the classics of the dance. If it is seen, done correctly to the choreography of Petipa, it is easy to understand the esteem in

## DOCTOR COPPÉLIUS

which Delibes was held in Russia. And, by the same analogy, there need be no mystery in the fact that Tchaikowsky is preferred by Russians, and not least by Strawinsky as can be read in his memoirs, and is put by them into a different category from their nationalist composers. This was, also, the view of Diaghilew, who infinitely preferred Tchaikowsky to any other Russian composer. A favourite piece with Diaghilew was the interlude called Panorama which comes in *La Belle au Bois dormant*. A great drop scene depicting a romantic castle rising out of a hill of cypresses, with an equestrian statue rearing up above its battlements, was painted by Bakst.<sup>1</sup> It is in such moments that the other derivation of these airs is apparent. They have the same Italian origin as the 'pantomimes expressives' of Berlioz. This was a device invented and made use of by Berlioz in *Les Troyens*, in which a symphonic interlude by the orchestra is interpreted on the stage by the miming of actors. The well-known *Chasse Royale et Orage* is an instance of this; and another is the scene in which Andromache, the widow of Hector, leads her son Astyanax by the hand through the burning ruins of Troy. The inspiration of Berlioz came, probably, from operas by Spontini or Méhul which have passed altogether out of knowledge. To this may be added, in the case of Tchaikowsky, his admiration for Bellini, upon whom his musical taste was first formed. It is precisely in Berlioz and in Tchaikowsky, whose music is based upon Italian more than Teutonic models, that this open cantilena is found. It can be recognized, alike in an early overture by Berlioz such as *King Lear*, and in the last overture that he ever wrote, *Béatrice et Bénédict*. It is in such works as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* and *Francesca da Rimini* that Tchaikowsky betrays the influence of Berlioz. These, again, are those of his works which show the greatest affinity to ballet as we have proved in their motifs which are, in conception, no more or less than airs for miming. If this is so, an illustrious pedigree can be drawn up for their descent and none who admire them would

<sup>1</sup>For the production at the Alhambra Theatre in November 1921.



## AIRS OF MIME

need to be surprised at this. The superb and unchecked flow of their cantilena, as in *Panorama*, requires no other explanation.

All three ballets of Tchaikowsky abound in such magniloquent passages. In the first act of *Le Lac des Cygnes* there is the music associated with the entry of the prince and his mother; there is the entrancing and spellbound air which is prelude to the second act, *Le Lac des Cygnes* proper, as it were; while the third act has, again, the ceremonial airs of the court and the sputtering, flamelike utterances which announce the magician and accompany his miming. The fourth act or apotheosis is little else but mime: *La Belle au Bois dormant*, which is a work conceived upon a larger scale than *Le Lac des Cygnes*, is just as full of such passages, of which *Panorama* has only been mentioned because it is the most striking example, with a special drop scene all to itself. But, in general, it may be said of this ballet that these airs are prolonged into a definite episode as, for instance, a march or the entrance of the wicked fairy Carabosse. There are so many figurants upon the stage that the action has to be prevented from becoming too static. So closely have Petipa and Tchaikowsky collaborated that this great body is kept, as it were, in continual circulation and the amenities of the dance are not allowed to degenerate into mere spectacle. It is not otherwise with *Casse Noisette* which, owing to the placing of its story in the time of Hans Andersen, is a peculiar amalgam of Kate Greenaway, or Hugh Thompson, with episodes that are no less than the climax of the art of dance. It is the third act containing the *Fée Dragée* and the *Danse des Mirlitons* and ending with the *Valse des Fleurs*, to which this applies. In these familiar numbers from *Casse Noisette* it is, perhaps, the peculiarly aloof attitude of the composer, due to his obsession by things that were intangible to him in his life, that gives transcendental quality to the music. It moves in an exoticism that has no equivalent elsewhere and that, generally speaking, is a stronger portrait of the dancer than is supplied by his or her authentic image. Perhaps a strange flavour, which was not apparent in *Le Lac des*

## THE ADAGIO

*Cygnets* of fifteen years earlier, has entered into this music. The unattainable personality of the dancers, impossible of access because it is mere travesty and illusion and in their real persons, from which he was equally debarred, only to be seen in diminution away from the false lights, in the cold light of mere night or day, such is the glamour of *Casse Noisette*. But, also, and above all else, it is an enlargement of experience as if composed on purpose to be the earliest music heard in childhood and the first breath that reaches us of the wonders of the theatre.

There remain to be considered the great solo-dances of Tchaikowsky. They occur chiefly in the third act of each ballet concerned, by which time the plot is so far developed that this virtue of the ballerina has become part of the direction of the story. She is dancing not only for the plaudits of the audience but it is essential for the dramatic scheme that there should come this idyllic clash, this strutting and preening of plumes between the lovers. It is now that the composer rises to the occasion. In his hands the grande adagio or pas de deux has a sustained power that it has never achieved, before or since. This must be due, in part, to Petipa whose immense experience as dancer and choreographer gave him the knowledge of what lengths it was possible to go to, when there must come a rest and the play of the tune and how, then, the geometrical figures could resume. His air must touch at all these points of contact, and take up and control the pattern, giving to it the utmost dramatic intensity possible to its shape.<sup>1</sup> The great solo dances

<sup>1</sup>The minute directions laid down by Petipa for the composer to follow can be read in the life of Tchaikowsky written by his brother, Modeste. *Casse Noisette* is the ballet in question.

No. 1. Musique douce. 64 mesures.

No. 2. L'arbre s'éclaire. Musique pétillante de 8 m.

No. 3. L'entrée des enfants. Musique bryuante et joyeuse de 24 m.

No. 4. Le moment d'étonnement et d'admiration. Un tremolo de quelques mesures.

No. 5. Marche de 64 mesures.

No. 6. Entrée des Incroyables. 16 m. rococo (tempo menuet).

No. 7. Galop.

## THE ADAGIO

were worked out with the closest care and collaboration between choreographer and composer. Their form is not at all what would be anticipated from the hysterical climaxes of Tchaikowsky's symphonies. They are given a sort of tragic or ecstatic importance by their slowness, for the most difficult figures of the dance require an open simplicity during which their intricacy can be watched. The music, therefore, is only stressed at its own points of drama which, by pre-arrangement, are the salient turns of the dance. The inherent Tchaikowsky is kept in check, as it were, by the strength of these imposed limitations upon him. For once, the invisible actors of his inner drama are given outer and tangible shape. It is no longer necessary for him to describe them, nor to make excuses for himself. All that is needed from him is the music to set them in motion.

But, at this point, we can hold back no longer from our own interpretation. It is of living performers that we write. Neither is it possible that the light can be too strong for this. For it is part of the glamour of the theatre to see as we can never see again. The bodies of the dancers must turn slowly in the light, giving us the illusion that we watch them from every angle of space at one and the same time. But not yet: there is a shudder of silence, like the thrill of danger or injury to the dancers. The unbelievable is about to happen: and the grande adagio begins. The dancers are letting the intoxication of this danger run into

No. 8. *L'entrée de Drosselmeyer. Musique un peu effrayante et en même temps comique. Un mouvement large de 16 à 24 m.*

*La musique change peu à peu de caractère, 24 m. Elle devient moins triste, plus claire et enfin passe à la gaité.*

*Musique assez grave de 8 m. et aussi temps d'arrêt.*

*Le reprise des même 8 m. et aussi temps d'arrêt. 4 mesures avec des accords d'étonnement.*

No. 9. *8 m. D'un temps de mazourka, 8 autres m. de mazourka. Encore 16 m. de mazourka.*

No. 10. *Une valse piquée, saccadée et bien rythmée, 48 m.'*

It is, as Mr. Edwin Evans observes, no less than remarkable that, tied by such restrictions, Tchaikowsky should have produced such excellent music. Cf. *Tchaikowsky*, in 'The Master Musicians Series', by Edwin Evans, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1936, p. 101.

## THE ADAGIO

their veins. It is apprehension of the eyes of the audience, for this and the music make the danger. There is none other. But, while they wait in the wings, it must run upon them and thrill their skins. It is imminent, immediate. They are both involved, by now, in the beat of the dance.

He comes on first and stands still for a moment bowing to the applause. But, suddenly, she runs in upon the quickening of the music, while he waits for her with outstretched arm pointing into the shadow. She runs into the heart of the light and, together, they walk slowly on their flat-heeled dancing shoes, nearer and nearer to the music.

It is the *Fée Dragée* once again. The hardihood of her approach into the light is incredible in daring, exciting the senses even more than the sight of her beauty. It is a walk to the sacrifice, or immolation. Her affirmative beauty has provoked this. you can see the green water of her eyes, the curving or gentle tilting of her nose, and her nostrils cut like lyres, or like the leaves of the tulip tree. All made for pleasure; for poetry, or comedy, and not for danger. Her legs, seen in perfect length to the joining of the body, are a poem in themselves. Her lovely arms, and the smallness of her wrists. So she comes nearer into perfection and, to the shaping of the air, now well upon its course, takes up her position in the very centre of the stage.

One foot, like a bird's foot, like the foot of a peacock or a silver pheasant, she plants firmly upon the boards and leaning her weight upon it throws her body forward, lying, as it were, upon the lights of the stage. He is behind her, holding back her arms, while she leans forward upon the air. Lower and lower she reaches, while her other leg, balancing her body lies in lovely length along the light. In the climax of her tension she lifts her throat back, which raises her smiling lips. Her body arches a little. Her back curves: the backward leg curves up and backward, she raises her head and to another upward movement of that outstretched leg throws back her forehead. Her eyes sparkle in their green water and she smiles. It is part smile

## THE ADAGIO

and part obeisance; the nodding of the pony's plumes in its circus trick. Her partner holds her arms, or, as it were, her wings. This little captive creature, who is now to be seen as very small, cannot or will not escape. She is a little winged horse, or human bird. His hands hold back and pinion her arms; and as if he was dipping her in water, or in the light, she sways to and fro upon the air, on the point, now, of that one foot. Lower and lower she leans, breasting the light. Held in his wrists she flutters her hands, she turns this way and that. Back goes her forehead again. Once more the trick comes. She makes as if to touch the crown of her head with her foot. Her green eyes smile again, looking upwards as if to see this. And now, to a turn in the music, she is upright in his arms on one point. This is the play of her legs. The raising of her height upon the points of her toes lifts them into a particular perfection of form. They can be seen in ideal length, the instruments of her art. She bends one knee and quivers the sole of that shoe against her other leg. It is the fluttering of wings, the play of wings in captivity, beating upon the bars. And, then, on the climb of the tune she lifts into the air upon a chain of entrechats, and returning, spins like a top, held within the cage of his two arms. It is a stage of the dance accomplished. He kneels with one knee upon the boards: she walks slowly to the back of the stage, round and behind him, and returning on the fanfare kneels upon his knee, her other leg stretching straight behind her, and like a swan in flight he lifts her to his shoulder and rising to his feet carries her into the wings.

Immediately, without waiting, the orchestra begins for him. It is his solo dance; in which, at the end, spinning backwards in great leaps upon a wide circle, he finishes to the music as neatly as if leaning both elbows upon the brass-ledge of the tune. Next comes her solo; and he has to watch her, smiling and drawing in deep breaths, sometimes making a gesture of his hands to her, and altering his pose the better to see her. The air given to her is a waltz that begins simply enough. But it draws in virtuosity

## THE ADAGIO

upon its plumes. Its simplicity is a vehicle or scaffolding for display. It is now that we have the *manège de petits tours* and the series of thirty-two *échappés* travelled from the front to the back of the stage. It finishes with the thirty-two *fouettés*, so quickly accomplished that it is difficult to realize the feat is done. The light fabric of that enchanting waltz would have seemed hardly strong enough to bear these little darting points, this pointillism of steps.

But they are standing together at the far corner of the stage. The prelude to the final dance, the warming to its beat begins. They start upon the air. For her it is a series of quick, preening turns. But he traverses the entire diagonal of the boards, leaping to an incredible height, while he so flutters his hands and there is such beating and clapping of his feet that he gives the illusion of rising and hovering and never coming to earth. This done, their ease is in a running or circling of the stage. It is thus that the birds of paradise dance for each other, at dawn, in the glades of the forest. Round and round they circle, contrariwise to each other, and to the dying of the verse come together and taking hands leap out upon the music, following that same diagonal across the boards. It is some half minute of flight, slowly done, to the full number of its flutterings. And, when these few seconds have been so long sustained that their permanence in the air seems assured, the music, like an aeroplane coming to land, touching the earth, rebounding, and taxiing across the field into its shed or hangar, brings the dancers to ground and in several leaps of triumph across the stage into the wings.

The glamour attaching to this extraordinary act is of a force that no other feat of dancing can achieve. We have already said that this music, in the great majority of its protagonists, is a stronger portrait of the dancer than is supplied by his or her authentic image. In the part of the *Fée Dragée*, an exceptional personal beauty is required in order that the music, itself,

## THE PRACTICE ROOM

should not give its own interpretation to the physical figuration of the performer. This dance, in the artificiality of its own paradise, is like the zany in comedy. The part can play itself; or it must be consummately done. But it is also possible, and has been proved in the accomplishment, to be so much the physical fulfilment of this music that the extreme of technical skill is not so important as this identity of role. A more than sufficient competence, which is, yet, not of the highest or transcendental order, can be allied to certain other qualities of personality that are found in no other living being. To that extent, therefore, this becomes the portrait of a person. The peculiar beauties of this music demand that they should be interpreted through those attributes which are hers, and hers alone. Neither is it necessary to keep, for this, within the strict limits of what is contained in all that Tchaikowsky created for the theatre. For the scenes that are inherent to this personality that we are discussing will take us beyond those boundaries into the action contingent upon her character.

It can be allowed to grow, out of the five positions of dancing. The scene need be no more than the bare classroom, though this can be so brilliantly lit against a white backcloth that it has more resemblance to the interior of a film-studio. This intensity of light is for our pleasure and for the purpose of photography. The mask of make-up will look natural, even from the distance of a foot or two away, which can never happen in the theatre. It is doubly natural and doubly artificial, as though this hyper-daylight was the habitat or norm of life to these beings of the gymnasium or classroom. They tread, bird-footed, in their flat-heeled shoes, smaller than in life, and are not yet in action. Birdlike, they rub their feet together, or tread in the spilt sand to give their shoes a grip upon the boards. Their feet, to them, are the fine point of the pencil upon the paper. They sharpen and try the edge and preen again.

And, suddenly, they spring upon their points. They are in action. The elevation of this extra height brings them into or-

## THE PRACTICE ROOM

dinary stature. But they cannot maintain it, standing still. They must be held in the arms, or hold to the bar. Its duration is of a few seconds only, for not so long as the hovering of a bird. It is like the whirring of wings at the window pane: the room is alive with flutterings. There is more realism, more of the bony structure of flight, because the dancers are in practice-dress. That which in opera is recitative and in ballet is the art of mime, the ordinary tread of their steps becomes, and their rest in the intervals, or their bending down to the shoe lace. These movements are more formal than their action on the points, which breaks and totters.

It is only, birdlike, with the planting of one foot upon the boards that the *Fée Dragée* throws herself again upon the light, one arm forward as if to reach a flower, the whole line of her body and its outstretched leg being balanced at a right angle upon that bird foot. This position is done with such ease that it is her medium to breast the light in this manner. It is no more difficult than swimming. Or she will change from one foot to the other, in alternation of that attitude, and smiling, as if in the sunlit sea. But there is, also, the sharpening or simple straightening of the points when she stands with both hands upon the bar, rises upon her points, and the perfection of both legs draws down the eyes to her arched insteps and up the lovely strain of her muscles again in calves and thighs. Or it is the planting of both feet, birdlike, as if to make the footmarks of a bird, a position which relaxes the muscles so that they are seen, as it were, out of travesty and in their ordinary ease. In the next, with a breath and a spring into the air, she is lifted to her partner's shoulder, upon which pivot she can flower in one or other attitude; lying, head forward, like a flying figure, as if swimming or flying and he stood beneath her while her legs are pressed together straight out behind her, like the tail of this amphibian, whose captor should carry in his other hand a trident, in virtue of Neptune and this maiden he has taken; or, once upon his shoulder, she sits to right or left, one knee drawn up,



## THE PRACTICE ROOM

and rides him in triumph, throned sideways like Europa on the bull, with her idle hand posed for a sceptre.

The handing down of this statue from her pedestal is noiseless and in a moment. Not a sound is made, for there is no music. This deliberation much increases the gravity of their movements, while it is still further enhanced by the simplicity of their practice dress. This is the bare bones, or geometry, of the dance. In this dancer it is as if she has been trained, at a moment's notice, to become a statue. She springs upon her points and is, at once, a hieratic being. Her solemnity, in one who has such power of attraction in her smile, gives her serenity and resolution as though she is a messenger of the gods, but not Cupid. She is a girl, dressed as Mercury. The precision of her pose upon one foot is the proof of this. For the feathers at her ankles she has the ribbons of her ballet shoes. It is a static attitude, or still, taken in isolation, and is the permanent truth about her.

For the quality of this dancer lies in her static precision. She is no spinning top; and is more beautiful in repose than in elevation. But what is lacking in that is redeemed in other ways. This little Mercury, or messenger, has the power of applying her physical personality into any shape that she fulfils. This is the word that she runs with; and her breath in the ear of any role that she undertakes is her entry into that character and its moulding to her shape. It becomes imbued with her personality, which is nothing large or strident. Here, in the practice room, the undisguised or actual truth is displayed. Travesty has no part to play in this hyper-daylight. Most dancers, who are improved by the spot light, do not appear to this perfection in their demi-life or preparation. But this hard light is her godhead or divinity and the shedding of it into travesty is the proof of those attributes which are present in her and are lacking in others. Her rare degree of physical perfection gives her, as it were, a poetical advantage over her rivals and the fundamental truth of this is apparent in these rudiments of the dance. Her possession of this poetical power is in compensation for what

## PIAZZA DI SPAGNA

she lacks in virtuosity. Another dancer, beginning without this foundation of physical and poetical perfection, can attain to those other qualities but they will be seen in isolation without the support of this indispensable basis of the art.

This serenity in form and expression, if it must be tied down to any particular application, has in it something of the Roman 'contadina'. This must be imagined as being true of a time when peasants who had come in from the hill towns to hire themselves out for painters' models thronged the steps of the Piazza di Spagna, in among the flower stalls. They came from the stern Abruzzi and from villages that lay nearer to the Neapolitan tarantella. All wore the costume of their village; and their brothers worked in the vines or were shepherds; and at Christmas, for the 'novena', came into the towns as zampognari or pifferari and played their bagpipes before the shrines of the Virgin. She will have driven into the town in one of the high two-wheeled wine carts, with its painted boards, green umbrella and hood that opened sideways, and have stepped down out of the shade into the sunlight, showing her white stockings. Her head will have been coiffed, which is not only classical but conveys a hint of the oriental or Greek, of crusading women, and even of the Turkish janissaries. When the 'contadina' takes her stand upon the steps she will look upon the ground, and will only speak when the French or German painter talks to her. She has come to hire herself out in order to help with the dowry for her marriage. It is needless to plot her adventures with the artists for they will end in nothing, but she will go home after the spring is over, to get married.

It is to be understood that her Madonnalike serenity, with which nothing can interfere, is contemporary with Ingres, then a man of thirty-five or forty years of age, and living in Rome. So this Madonna, in accordance with those lines of the Orient in her coif, can become his nude odalisque in the turban, smooth sultana of the silken couch. Or, in her village dress, she is the girl by the fountain with the amphora balanced upon her

## LA DORMEUSE DE NAPLES

head; or the water jar waits brimming while she gossips by the laundry lines. This prompts a fantasy among the fishing-nets, which must be tented to show the volcano and the bay through their meshes, for it is the *Dormeuse de Naples*, the lost picture painted by Ingres for Joachim Murat, King of Naples, and conjecture may build around what may have been prophetic of Picasso in that sunlit or moonlit title. We must impute to it something of the Virgilian calm of the bay, of the glittering ilex; but it has, also, the lazzaroni in their red, Phrygian caps, the tinkle of the mandoline, the tarantella and the tambourine. However, this serenity withdraws us from those noises of the southern town and it is, again, the stone steps and the flower-stalls. Bells are ringing in a hundred convents and the ochreous or golden buildings, the Rome of Borromini and Bernini, rises warm in the sunlight. Roses, irises and red carnations scent every step. It is a Wednesday morning, and the flower market is at its height. The models are standing in a cluster by Bernini's fountain of 'la barcaccia', which was made by him in the form of a waterlogged boat leaking in several places. This was his cleverness because the supply of water had too little pressure to spring up in a jet; but the convenience of his excuse is appropriate to the brimming pails of the flower market, the spilt water and the wet flower stems.

The models of the Piazza di Spagna were famed for their beauty. Certain places like Viterbo, a town of fountains, have been known for their beautiful girls since the time of the Caesars; but, in spite of its arcades of Gothic arches, in spite of the temptation of its splashing fountains, this serene and regnant calm, which is also little and aloof, tells of the ilex. It must be the slope of a hill. The solemn shade and darkly glittering leaves are the haunt of the shepherdess or little goat girl. In the steep noon she is the naiad of this grotto; but, now, it is evening. She comes out from the shadow to watch the sunset, barefoot, like little Cinderella, and leaning on her staff. There is a kerchief upon her head, and the rest of her clothes are in rags. Her shep-

## THE ELYSIAN FIELDS

herd's crook is, as well, the broom with which she sweeps the house for her cruel sisters. But, out here upon the hills, the only interior scene is in the ilex grove.

The sunset is a grave and solemn hour. From far, far down, comes up the angelus. There are many things to think of. But the pagan glitter of the grove tells of antiquity. The serene calm, of a sudden, knows its environment and, for the sake of the little shepherdess, is prolonged into the Elysian Fields of Gluck. The dance of the blessed spirits extends the ilex grove into timeless and perpetual evening. It is not an interlude but the aftermath of the opera. Never was music better named or more appropriate to the beauty of its interpreter. It is sad enough; but rested, as though new woken and all forgotten. The Sicilian, flower-dropping languor wants nothing with this interpreter. Her ideal and serene looks are in the measure that it treads, not too quick, nor slowly, in the asphodel. But it changes and becomes richer. The cooing of doves comes in the music. A warmer breath stirs in the Elysian trees. Ringdove and turtledove rattle in their warm throats and roll their r's. The flutes are piping: there are masks of water, mouthing song. The Elysian Fields, elysian avenues awake from their statues into life. No longer is that little shepherdess the unhappy ghost of the ilex-shade. Instead, she embodies the unearthly happiness of this valley. Everyone is lonely. This music of Gluck is solemn and gentle; as though there is much to be thankful for, but little reason to rejoice. The music is slow and gentle, and the little shepherdess, who has been heightened and made taller in its gravity, dances for us as though it is our last happiness. We can see her wide brow and the perfect lyre of her hips. This lovely being has a repose which saddens and makes desperate because it is so attuned to that world of which this is our only glimpse. Perhaps her only life is in that, and its diminishment down the ordinary days is no more than disillusionment; nevertheless it is there and the eyes have seen her. But the Sicilienne, or near-Sicilienne returns. The mists sadden: cold

## THE ECOSSAISE

dew clings to the grasses and slowly, sadly, the music dies away.

It should die behind the lowered curtain. It is better not to look again upon that embodiment of peace and calm but, remembering the music, to walk out of the darkened theatre into the lights. In that way the Elysian Fields maintain their illusion and the dancer her sacred and set-apart aloofness from the world.

The recovery or breaking of this mood depends upon other things and has many alternations from solemn into gay. It is concerned, first of all, with the smiling of this character, which changes her, at once, from that classical antiquity into contemporary time. It is like speech coming into the mouth of a statue, or like the opening of a ripe fruit to show the red and juicy flesh, the ripeness of its interior life. But more still, in this instance, it can be compared to the coming of speech to a little dumb animal. That pathos, that friendliness have found a voice, and this miracle sets up communication where, before, it was only possible by signs. The red lips and white teeth of the smile are in proof of its humanity; and so are the fineness of her wrists, and her ankles and thin legs, which relate her into the immediate and tangible present. For this is that figure of the masqued ball who wore a Scotch or tartan travesty and in that guise, as we have said, appears nowhere else in the acts except, for a moment only, in *Coppélia*, when there comes the Ecos-saise. But this is that person, living and speaking before our eyes, wearing such or such a size of gloves or shoes, eating, sleeping, leading the ordinary life. It is the miracle of this difference that takes the imagination. All the disguises of her profession have only this one tangible contact with the world. That may be divided, again, into as many different facets as she has moods or dresses for everyday life, but their number is as nothing to the limitless travesties of the theatre. But these only have existence for the eyes; they belong to another and different life, while we are concerned, just now, with the very person who inhabits

## THE ECOSSAISE

those husks or shells. She is so entirely detached from them as to possess equal beauty in the plain daylight. This lends itself to the counterfeit of period and manner. A flat mandarin hat, perched sideways upon the head like a little temple above a waterfall: the curls and high waist of the Regency, or, by a twist of the fingers, the locks, like little whiskers, of a Persian miniature and slanting, or almond eyes ready for the eggshell dresses, the silks of the pagoda: a mitre or tower of jasmine for the *bayadère* and shoulders like gilded dragon-eaves guttering with gold; a little tasselled harem cap, the Liotard clear blues and whites like the shine of porcelain, reddened finger-ends, high pattens clattering, of the odalisque or Georgian; the comb of tortoiseshell and white mantilla; all the countries of the fan; the fringe curled forwards, 'en bouton frisé' or 'en caniche', as a grisette of the Empire, the gaslight Napoleon, the bal mabille and the chandelier; a child from the apple-orchards of Kate Greenaway who is, now, a Beardsley drawing; a girl in a bustle, with a parasol; or with a mandoline and in a yellow skirt; such are her divagations, her diurnal life. But, shining through them all, under their transparency of time, is this person of the moment. It is the immediacy of her smile that relates her into the present. It is, as we have said, the slicing open of the pomegranate, the carnivorous truth, for the parting of her red lips is to show the teeth; but this assurance of the living animal is in proof that she is tangible and real. Thus, at any moment, her smile becomes the living reality underlying her disguises of time and temperament.

Again, once it is known, the two truths can be compared, one with another, through the travesty. This is, indeed, where the world of magic begins. Ghostlike, its inhabitants are seen, but have no other contact with ourselves than through the eyes. They do not even speak. This is her different or hieratic identity. But its poetry is given fresh force by the comparison of those two worlds, each with the same mystery behind it. The magical artifice is at work. Its countless images pass and re-pass

## THE HUNDRED TRAVESTIES

before the eyes. We see her as a goddess dancing in a net that is no more clinging than a lover's knot; it is her lover's stratagem, but its effect is only, like the lines of a squared drawing, to make her beauty more memorable: she is the mermaid coming out of the foam to dance, a mermaid changed into a girl, an essential metamorphosis, for her feet and legs are as necessary as the angel's wings, or she could not dance on the margin of the sands: a Lady of Shalott perpetually mirrored in the misty sedges, by the lake below the castle, and long before the barley ripened: in an officer's tunic sparkling with buttons and the skirt of a vivandière, in boots with silver spurs, a black necktie and a hat with a plume, she dances the pas de la cracovienne of Fanny Elssler: in a country dance, dressed in light green, the bucolic world has new and undreamed-of chances, little fraises des bois, little Alpine strawberries flecked with golden straws, crunched like golden and minute wasps, dipped in a saucer of red wine or a bowl of yellow cream that is furred with Cornish richness from the pastures, black cherries on the trees, a dove-cote full of doves, and the company of fawns, young cavaliers and fruit stealers ever on their ladders, the mouse-soft thatch and moonlight at the window sill; or she is a tightrope dancer at the fair: the Ecossaïse in tartan: an Amazon in a black tall hat: a Persian boy in pastel blue, in a starched ruff and playing the 'cello: a masked columbine in a white dress sprigged with cherries: the sylph of Taglioni, a wreath of stephanotis dewed with diamonds upon her hair: or, to the old and copious airs of Auber or Adolphe Adam, she sits beneath the great noble trees of the principal square in Ghent, she is the Jolie Fille de Gand and the notes of the carillon ring down from the tower, while the rich bourgeois, figurants of the theatre, take the summer evening under the lindens: she dances the tarantella from Masaniello, the true tarantella of the trellised vines, with smoking Vesuvius ever in view: the orchestra plays a tyrolienne outside the woodman's hut below the waterfall: the little Savoyard tunes of Linda da Chamonix, that have a hurdygurdy for

## THE HUNDRED TRAVESTIES

accompaniment, carry across the valleys: it is the *pas des patineurs* from *Le Prophète*, a military band upon the ice, or the Breton bagpipes of *Dinorah* in bucolic dances at the 'pardon': the *farandole* under the oak trees in *Mirella*, in the Provençal summer: more waltzes of Gounod: and from Offenbach, who wrote his tunes in fourwheelers on his way to the theatre, who seems to have slept and eaten in the gaslight of the stage, there is the bolero of *La Périchole*, the waltzes and tyroliennes of Madame Favart, *La Fille du Tambour-Major* with its tarantella, *Vert-Vert*, *Madame l'Archiduc* and *Le Roi Carotte*, tunes that are as individual as the little jackets à la zouave and the little hats of the season, in a hundred shapes made flat for the chignon or tilted for the nose, in as many forms as there are fuchsias, sepal and corolla, in angle of neatness and comical prettiness, down to the open air and Sunday afternoons of Chabrier, his picnic *bouffée* and his waltzes touched with Spain, his languorous habanera and, lastly, to Tchaikowsky, to whom we come back again through all these interludes.

It is Tchaikowsky to whom we return. His peculiar temperament makes him the epitome of the dance. Never again can its beauties have an equal opportunity, or be so well rewarded in their chances. But, now, their interior importance to the structure of this book must be explained. These are illusory pleasures for the eyes. It is in this that their poetry consists. They are intangible and fading pleasures. The power of touch has no part in them. They are symbols of things that fade and are evanescent. Even in light of knowledge and recognition they may bear little or no resemblance to their other selves. That may be seen again and again, but will report nothing of its truth. Travesty is, in itself, a lie. It is only its shadow that we seize. That has substance, but is not the same. It is only when we shut our eyes that the skeleton will clothe itself with flesh. Otherwise, all travesty is false, the masked are unmasked. Substitution is no satisfaction. If we are sightless in the theatre and see nothing, it is no less purposeless to look upon these shadows, once they



## LIVING IN ILLUSION

leave the light. They are so different that they are others. It is perpetual illusion, without truth of image. It is feeding the soul with honey, with sips of honey, and no bread or meat. This poetical diet can sustain the soul but not the body. For dissipation of the emotions it is equivalent to being in love with two or more persons at the same time, one and all of them unattainable. The only escape from this lies in the conquest of someone more near at hand. But, in this inner or interior world, it can be the same person. The luxury and richness of their fictitious life is in telling contrast to their true reality. It is in this way that the pursuit of these ideals through an intermediary becomes the picture of one phase of life. All those who have in their youth set out to conquer the world by writing poetry must become quickly contented by illusion. Its material rewards have no connexion with either its delights or its disappointments. Since poetry is the travesty of life and not its true picture it is the theatre, more than Nature, that is the mirror of its beauties. This is a quicker escape than life on the coral atoll, or the hundred approaches to the primitive. The multiple personality and appearance is point and purpose of the theatre. It is by this that it earns its bread. But when, in strictness of principle, its participants are deprived of speech, when they move in the heightened convention of dance and mime, when music is their medium and their language, then the poetry of the illusion is immeasurably increased. For silence on the stage is like celibacy in the Church: it assures the sacred and hieratic character. Its parallel with poetry is in the perpetual pursuit of the illusory and the unreal. Their identity is made more close by their artificial condition. And the emergence out of the false lights into daylight and into ordinary life is the success or unsuccess of the illusion. Its tangible benefits can never be encompassed except in diminution. They can never be seized and held under the lights. To live and sleep and eat in that illusion is beyond possibility of accomplishment. Its delights and rewards are, in this, an absolute equivalent to those of poetry. Only the intermediary between

## LIVING IN ILLUSION

these two worlds has a potentiality that no other instrument of poetry can possess. And its implications come, in the end, to have direct association, where the emotions are concerned, with all that attaches to the unattainable or unprofitable ends of life. Its enjoyment lies in eternal substitution of image. That which the hands can touch is never what the eyes have seen. There is no average or modicum and all is in extremes.

We are passing out of the pleasant pages of this book into the troubled and unhappy distance. Soon, the frightful winds will begin. Already, our delights are intangible and never to be touched. They are never what they seem. This is the perverse pleasure in their capture. But the poetical body still lives and moves in the lights. Illusion is an end in itself; only the tension is more tenebrous and thin. Its own shadows haunt it, and the fabric is exceptional and transcendental. This is because of the peculiar temperament of its creator. Our interpretation must betray, also, the hand of its translator whose delectation will move among the music. The more glamour that we can give to it, the more poignant will be its contrast to the scenes that follow, where neither light, nor warmth, nor love can reach to the heart. This is, where living is concerned, the last pleasure of the senses. With the extinction of the lights the body dies and the wanderings or suspensions of the soul, like an injured thing that nothing can kill, rend the air with their sufferings and torments.

Until then, the galaxy must burn. Their concentration is more than daylight. It is upon this sea of light that the music embarks. This is a world, in itself, that exists only so long as the music lasts. It is the paradise or poetical world of its creator, inhabited by the figures that only such conditions of artifice can realize. This fire of inspiration; this inhabiting of their souls and bodies as they move to his invention, is all that his talent gave him. They belong to him, body and soul, in that moment, whether he, himself, is alive or dead. That does not matter: it was all obtained in the moment of its invention, just as though his possession of them was assured by some diabolical compact.

## LIVING IN ILLUSION

It may be the intuition of this that has created other works of art, for the ghost can wait his time among the spectators or protagonists.

In only a few moments nothing of this will be left. But the consoling factor in the theatre is that its cheaper or stucco'd travesty of the ideal comes into operation every evening. This rebirth or recreation in the turning on of the lights is the advantage that it possesses over every other form of art. For fullness of their world of illusion we have compared the dancers in a ballet to the figures upon a painted ceiling; but it is only in the genius of a Luca Giordano or a Tiepolo that such a cosmogony exists. It is true of a handful of instances and no more. Luca Giordano, when he painted the Medici as gods of light among the deities of Olympus, at the Palazzo Riccardi at Florence; and in his frescoes of the Battle of St. Quentin at the Escorial: Tiepolo, when he painted Olympus and the Four Quarters of the World, at Würzburg; the History of Anthony and Cleopatra at the Labia, in Venice; or the Courses of the Sun, at the Palazzo Clerici at Milan: one or two ceilings of Pietro da Cortona, at Rome; his Triumph of the Barberini, in the palace of that name: and his History of the Aeneid at the Palazzo Pamphilj; these painted walls or ceilings have such an affinity to classical ballet that they are its nearest, or only equivalent. And, if there is one thing that is certain, it is that Tchaikowsky would have been the last person to realize the truth of this. None the less it is true.

But the immense advantage possessed by classical ballet is in its nightly renewal. The living embodiment must triumph over the flaking and crumbling plaster of fresco. If, then, we have called the theatre a 'cheaper and stucco'd travesty of the ideal', it is because the mirrors and the gilding that are its life make a frame for something that is true, at least, of the moment. It is inhabited by living bodies, even if our eyes are the only testimony and they never touch our hands. They move and make a hundred pictures in place of one. Also, their doubled or echoed life, which should be an empty shell away from the stage, gives

## LAST ACT

them the solid reality that is lacking in the theatre. Their multiple personalities, multiplied again in the music, inhabit a fickle and accommodating world of their own creation, that is paper-thin but none the less convincing. If, to those who can use their eyes, there is never monotony in the ordinary visual life, here its detail is increased a hundredfold. There are limitless variations from night to night; the music, even, never sounds the same; the fixed standard wavers or is excelled; there is no mean average; nor any permanence.

But the prelude or overture strikes up again. This time the dancers come down among the audience. We will see them come down among the guests and walk out into the darkness. The theatric world burns up again in all its lights. There is the fascination of cliché and convention even in the most banal of the airs. They are in reminder of the drab and unadorned reality; the walk home or the tram or omnibus after the theatre; the cup of cocoa from the gasring; all those true realities that underlie this furious hyper-realism of lights and colours, this pretence of princes and princesses, the intoxication of this music.

For, already, it has cast its spell. Our words move with its rhythm. There comes the opening of a waltz, the peasants run in from every side with their basketfuls of fruit, there are four bars that thrill the very skin, instruments of every kind sound their notes without being touched, trees of all seasons break into flower, and the waltz begins. It is linked and held together: it is separated and it joins again. It fills and holds the theatre: it surpasses itself and comes back again. The copious and ascendant coda ends and rings in triumph: it is done and dies. This waltz of *La Belle au Bois dormant* has its aftermath of mime which tightens and strengthens the convention. It keeps the dancers to their life of dancing and prepares for the adagio.

But we forgo the details of its time and place. This is the grande adagio; and the dancers walk on slowly, hand-in-hand, while the music portrays some immense and slow climax, some climacteric of passion in this ascetic world of chance, where

## GRANDE ADAGIO

these puppets of such slow training come together only in obedience to the music and are the mirrors of poetical expression to those who watch them. Their restraint is the more telling against that terrific climax of the brass: and, after it, they walk round again to ease their limbs and the terror returns once more into the instruments.

It is the courting of two birds in the boughs of a tree. But the storm of wind blows into the branches. The prince and princess hold to the air, the long and cadenced open melody, as if it were the boughs, the very branches and their foothold. The excitement of the tune enters into them, and melts upon their bodies. They become sharp figures, in isolation, drawn upon the hyaline. It is the dawn or diamond air; and then becomes the middle of the bare boards, with the eyes of everyone in the theatre looking down upon them. And the melody is so slow, like a long lifetime. But, again, the terror or the exaltation returns. It lifts them, like a god and goddess on a cloud. And, yet, they are nothing to each other. Hired partners and no more. But they are priests and victims of the sacrifice. The long-drawn blood will flow. They are athletes, gymnasts, dancers of the adagio. For the grande adagio is about to die. Its end is foreshadowed. And now it quickens: it is ending but not dying.

But, in their ecstasy, Odette, the real princess, of whom this is only the ghost, warns him by beating at the window. It was but a ghost or shadow that he danced with, the daughter of the magician. It is Odile: and Odette, his love, is in the cold outside the window. She is as a ghost at the window-pane. The magician who is like an astrologer or redbeard wizard, like the Grand Signior whom the Italians painted for the Sultan, and who was yet the Basileus, the Caesar of the fairy tales, this magician, blue gowned, rises to his feet. He makes a sign to Odile: Odette, or her ghost at the window, he waves away. There is thunder in the orchestra, and instant darkness.

When the lights go up again a scene without precedent is taking place. The theatre is emptying, but emptying from stage

## THE DANCERS DESCEND INTO LIFE

into auditorium. They come down two wide stairways from the wings. They come running down as if upon the stairs on the way to their dressing rooms, talking and laughing along the passages. And they come down the front row of stalls and meet, from either side, in the centre gangway. They are like children leaving school. They loom larger and larger: they are coming back into the eyes. The convention is broken. It is our farewell to the dancers. And, yet, they are more little than in life, running on their flat dancing shoes, with painted faces and darkened eyelashes. Each dancer is his or her own dwarf, out of the lights. The paper walls are broken: they have come down into the crowd.

But the theatre doors are open wide and they pass out into the street, which is full of men and women walking under the lights and waiting for the dancers to come out. It can be Drury Lane, the historical and ghostly theatre-street of London. So much we can see, but it is far away at the end of the vista. This moment is immediate, for it is so quickly dead. Already, some of the dancers are lost and gone for ever. It is more dramatic than a call before the curtain. Their state is transitional between the two worlds they live in. This is their dying, or transition, between their own firelight and the pentecostal flame. For this is the beating down of the barrier; it is the intangible touched and taken in the hand. Only something is added to it which it did not have before. They speak and are more little than in the lights. They are made up for that and are altered. If only we could close the doors and keep them shut. It would be the held moment; the *grande adagio* explained. But the stage is empty. They come past in spangles, in diamond ornaments and tights. Here are the harlequins of the *pas de trois*, half Mercury and half gendarme, in their hats. This, or that, is Columbine. She is the *Fée Dragée*: or *Adagiette*. We see her, only for a moment, walking birdfooted, in her ballet skirt, and she is lost. All are scattered and dispersed. The lights go down: the diamond rain begins.

## IV

### THE BANQUET, OR CENACOLO

#### 4. Edmund Kean and the Spangled Drama

*'To see Kean act is like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning.'*—COLERIDGE.

It has been promised that these last pages will go up in a flame of sulphur, in order to leave the smell of that in the nostrils and its blinding light before the eyes. Given our subject there will be no difficulty in this. For there can never have been more apt material to our end of noise and drama. Every detail that can be ascertained is in harmony with this intention. When thinking of Edmund Kean one knows not which is the more extraordinary, the facts of his life, or the reports of his acting. He was extreme in everything and sober in nothing. His significance to ourselves is in his stretching of technique or artifice to its furthest points of fury. The extremity of his gesture is just before the curtain falls. It is the symbol of impotent rage and despair, of impending disaster and purgatorial fire. He has the courage of fury, and he fails. This has happened before and will befall again: but we must begin his story.

If every Cockney or true Londoner must be born within the sound of Bow Bells it is only right that Edmund Kean should see the light within two minutes' walk of Drury Lane. He was born, then, and we may assert without fear of contradiction that it was a night of fog, upon 4 November, 1787, in the rooms occupied by his maternal grandfather, George Savile Carey. His mother was Anne Carey, a hawker and itinerant actress; and mother and grandfather, in their poverty, were descended

## THE DOORSTEP

from George Savile, the famous Marquis of Halifax. Anne Carey, having nowhere else to lay her head, had taken refuge with her father. She was unmarried.

The father of her child was either Edmund Kean; or else it was his brother Aaron Kean. They were of Irish descent and lived, with a third brother, Moses Kean and a sister, Mrs. Price, at 9 St. Martin's Lane. None of them did anything to help the child. They left the mother to her own devices. Nor does her own father seem to have shown any sympathy to her; or, perhaps, it is more likely that father and daughter were in league together to rid themselves, as soon as possible, of this unwanted nuisance. Within a few days of its birth the baby was deserted by its mother and sheltered by a couple who picked him up in a doorway in Frith Street, Soho. Up to this point, the story of this genius could hardly be bettered. It is succession of winter nights, of starving men and women huddled in doorways; and, during this time, the mother returned again to her old profession, singing in the street and outside the doors of taverns.

By this time the child will have been weaned, but almost, we may say, before he had cut his teeth, we find him in 1790, at the age of three, acting at Her Majesty's Theatre. He had been chosen for his black eyes to personate Cupid; and, as Cupid, lay at the feet of Sylvia and Cymon in a ballet of the great Noverre. In the following year he is for the first time, at the age of four, upon the stage of Drury Lane. He played the part of a little page in *Love Makes a Man* and in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; and, as a demon, in another play underwent so severe a training from the posture master that he was compelled to wear irons in order to prevent permanent dislocation of his limbs.

At about this time his mother, owing to some cause which is unknown to us, owned to his existence. It was in her capacity as mother that she opposed his first attempts at education; and in the end he went to school, through the charity of a Jew, in Orange Court, Leicester Square. But in 1795, when only eight years old, he ran away from home, wherever 'home' may have



## TO SEA

been, went on foot to Portsmouth and shipped as cabin boy on a vessel bound for Madeira. The brutal discipline of the ship was not to his liking so that he had to determine to be left on shore. On arrival at Funchal he counterfeited deafness and paralysis as the result of a cold and was carried off the ship to hospital. In a day or two his vessel sailed without him; and, continuing his deception, the little boy so puzzled his doctors that they embarked him on another boat and sent him home as patient. He, somehow, reached London, almost certainly on foot, and took refuge with his uncle Moses Kean. This will have been in lodgings in St. Martin's Lane; and his uncle, who was a ventriloquist, gave him lessons in elocution.

He is back again, in fact, within the purlieus of Drury Lane and Leicester Square. We may imagine that he spent his days and nights in the company of actors, acrobats and circus folk, running errands and picking up tricks and scraps of knowledge. It must have been in some such manner that he made friends with Miss Tidswell, an actress at Drury Lane, who took pity on him, gave him shelter, and owing to her kindness to him was for some time regarded as his mother. It was not yet the turn of the century; Kean was only twelve years old, and Miss Tidswell paid for him to go to school, in Green Street, Leicester Square.<sup>1</sup> We may suppose that he made periodical visits to his ventriloquist uncle on the slender chance of being given a few coppers, but his mother and his grandfather were either disowning him again or were, more probably, too poor to help him. Miss Tidswell could only be kind to him periodically, when she could afford it; and the rest of the time the child sang and danced at tavern doors, in the streets, or at country fairs.

After a time he decided to work the provinces, perhaps because nobody had any more money to give him, and began by running away to Bartholomew Fair, where he acted as a tumbler in Saunder's Circus. It was a rough life, working most of

<sup>1</sup>Previously to this, his aunt, Mrs. Price, had him sent to school in Chapel Street, Soho.

## KEAN AS HARLEQUIN

the day and night and sleeping in a damp tent, and so violently did he have to fall in order to earn his living that he fell and broke both legs, an accident from which he never entirely recovered. He now acquired some celebrity as Harlequin, and can be seen as such in a Petrouchka-like print of Bartholomew Fair. A little after this, in 1803, he was earning fifteen shillings a week at Sheerness, playing Norval and Harlequin. His engagements took him farther into the provinces and to Ireland, with the result that for a few years his movements cannot be traced. Between 1803 and 1806 he disappears altogether. According to his own story he was, during part of this time, at Eton College, and considering how strange his whole career was, and that he would certainly have been there under a different name, it is not altogether impossible that he may have attended for a term or two. Kean never seems to have made any clear statement as to who paid for this expensive part of his career, but it cannot be dismissed as altogether untrue.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, during all, or nearly all these years, it is certain that he played in circuses and barns, in country towns and in remote villages. He slept in mean theatrical lodgings, in the barn in which he had played, and often, we may be certain, under a hedge or in a haystack. And, during this time, he was learning Shakespeare, living, if we only knew it, in very much that environment in which the plays were written.

His life as strolling player took him to every corner of England while he gradually took on more serious roles and was no longer Harlequin but Hotspur. By degrees, and through his incessant travelling, his local fame must have spread. He is described, at this time, as small, dark and thickset. His genius was shown in his extraordinary eyes and hands; his enunciation was rapid and perfect, and he identified himself so closely with his roles that they never seemed real again without him. In 1808 he was married to Mary Chambers, an actress, who was nine

<sup>1</sup>It is supposed to have been Dr. Drury, headmaster of Harrow, who sent him to Eton.

## THEATRICAL FAME

years older than himself. Fortune came to him, at last, in 1813, at the York Theatre, where he was playing Hamlet. In his own words: 'the audience was miserable, but a gentleman in the stage box appeared to understand acting and to him, accordingly, he played.' This gentleman was none other than Arnold, the stage manager of Drury Lane, who had, we may assume, come to York on purpose to hear him, and Kean was promptly engaged for the following season. Rumour was already at work describing the surprise that was in store for the London audience; and the first appearance of Kean at Drury Lane,<sup>1</sup> or the first time he had appeared there since the age of three, was the occasion of great excitement and controversy. He was triumphant from the first moment and by the end of that season was the most celebrated actor in England. Within a very short time he was earning what were, for those days, unprecedented sums of money. There was not universal admiration for his acting: some found it too vehement and expressive, but all agreed that it was phenomenal and there can be little doubt that Kean was the most remarkable English actor that had yet appeared, and the one to whom the word genius is most nearly applicable.

For the next few years his career was an unending succession of triumphs. What Coleridge said of him is inscribed at the head of this chapter. It tells us exactly what we would want to know as to the characteristic of his acting, which was vehemence or fury, and tragical pathos. It is, also, reported of him, which is a parallel to the stories of the greatest executive musicians, of Liszt and Anton Rubinstein, that he would repeat a performance upon the following day and that it would be so different as to be almost unrecognizable, and yet perfect in every particular. But the state of his nerves could not rest content with fame. The decline or setting of his genius had to be as picturesque as its ascension. He began to drink heavily, prematurely exhausted as he was by the terrible hardships of his childhood and the strain of his successes. His wife, whom he had married

<sup>1</sup>26 January 1814, as Shylock.

## THEATRICAL FAME

in 1808, was powerless to prevent this increasing fever which tormented him. In place of the privations of his youth he now developed the wildest eccentricities, which yet were natural to him and in no way the result of pose or affectation. We are told that he would walk his horse, which he named Shylock, up and down the theatre steps in the early morning, or gallop wildly along the turnpike roads, sleeping with his steed in the stable on his return home. At this time, also, a wave of doubt or uncertainty assailed him about his own birth, and he is reported to have paid allowances to two different women as his mother.

Habits of intemperance grew upon him, more and more, and his wife left him. But his son Henry Kean, who by this time gave signs of being a promising actor, played subordinate parts with him and they shared the same roof. Kean continued to squander his earnings and in order to recoup himself undertook several tours to America. His first appearance in New York, in 1820, was the occasion, almost, of a riot and aroused the liveliest controversy. His memory had begun to fail him; and there could be no certainty as to what manner of a performance he would give. But he was received everywhere with tremendous excitement, and his drunkenness and his eccentricities did nothing to diminish the welcome that he was accorded. On subsequent visits he met with an equal warmth of reception. Every kind of honour was paid to him. Among other things, he was made honorary chief of the Hurons, a Red Indian tribe. This, for some curious reason, he seems to have appreciated more than anything else. He said that he considered it the greatest honour of his life, and so odd was his behaviour that there can be little doubt that he was growing a little deranged in mind. In Canada, he was on one occasion locked up, for a time, as a lunatic. On his last return from America we have an account of him, in 1827, in his room at Hummum's Hotel, in Covent Garden, 'sitting up in his bed, a buffalo skin wrapped around him, a huge hairy cap decked with many coloured feathers on his

## DEAD

head, a scalping knife in his belt, and a tomahawk in his hand', in his regalia, in fact, as chief of the Hurons.

He had, now, the appearance of an old man, and greying hair, although he was only just forty years of age. There were always loaded pistols by his hand and, also, invariably, a bottle of brandy. He could not be relied upon to get successfully through a performance, but was still capable, perhaps more than ever, of producing the most violent effects of genius in horror or terror. It was of this phase in his career that the criticism of Coleridge was more to the point than ever before. His son must have led, by all accounts, the most peculiar life with him, being roused up at all hours of the night to go for a headlong drunken gallop on horseback, or, conversely, to spend the day watching him drink and rave in a darkened room with the blinds drawn. Financial affairs were in a hopeless tangle. He would accumulate money like a miser, one week, and the next week would give away everything that he possessed to the first person to ask for it. His clothes were in rags, while he wore valuable jewels and watches that he had recovered from pawn and would return the next day in order to pay his arrears of rent. If he could have sobered himself he was still capable of earning great sums of money. But his life had been too much for him and had turned his brain. He was crippled with gout and rheumatism and may have suffered from the effects of other illnesses, as well. He was a dying man. His last performance was at Covent Garden, on 25 March 1833, where he took the part of Othello to his son's Iago. In the fourth act he reeled and trembled, and fell into the arms of his son, muttering, 'I am dying. Speak to them for me!' They gave him a glass of warm brandy, his inevitable drink, and carried him to his cottage, next door to the Richmond Theatre,<sup>1</sup> where he lay for a few days, between life and

<sup>1</sup>Many years before this, Kean had built himself a cottage in a solitary and beautiful situation in the Isle of Bute, to which he used to retire to rest himself. It would be interesting to know what has become of this little house with its strange memories.

## DEAD

death. He was reconciled to his wife, whom he had not seen for many years. She came back to him, and a day or two after this, on 15 May 1833, he died. Eight days later his mother, Anne Carey, died.

So lived and died the greatest English actor there has ever been. Before, or since, there has been no one to dispute that title. But it is possible to read many other things into his career besides that mere pre-eminence of his genius. The inevitable history of this child, from the moment of its birth, the way in which he was apparently condemned by fate to suffer every hardship and privation, puts him on a level with those characters whom we are to deal with in the final pages of this book, who were caught, or so it would seem, in a trap, whose purgatory extended for all the length of their own existence so that they never escaped from it and were predestined for unhappiness and suffering. If it emerges that they were hopeless and incapable of improvement, then the injustice of their punishment is the more conspicuous. It is the same with Edmund Kean. From the moment he was cast upon the world, or left on that wintry night upon the doorstep, he was to endure every kind of torment. As soon as success came to him, that inner fire, which made him suffer, let him perish almost as directly as by the action of his own hand. It had been decided, before his birth, that he was to know no peace; and it was only in order to lend drama to his decline that his genius let him mount so high.

The career of this strolling player, this bastard of a woman who was hawker and itinerant actress, this nephew of a ventriloquist, this street child in whose veins there ran the distant and necessary strain of aristocratic blood, was alive with every detail that could give colour to his profession. If we consider him as the ghost or presiding genius of Drury Lane, it is remarkable how every place at which he touched is within a minute or two's walk of that theatre. He was picked up on a doorstep in Frith Street; his uncle and father lived in St. Mar-

## THE GHOST OF DRURY LANE

tin's Lane: he went to school in Orange Court and then in Green Street, Leicester Square; he played at Drury Lane when he was three years old: he ran away to Bartholomew Fair: his benefactress, Miss Tidswell, was an actress of Drury Lane: his sensational debut was at that theatre: while our glimpse of him in his bedroom, in that fantastic attire, was at an hotel no farther away than Covent Garden. The appropriate incidents crowd in upon one another almost too closely to be numbered. When we think of him it is always in connexion with this part of London, and the memory of him haunts those streets just as surely as the ghost of de Quincey is ever pacing the pavement in Soho Street, between Soho Square and Oxford Street, looking among the hundreds of streetwalkers to find the likeness or incarnation of his Anne. There is the suggestion of these two ghosts present on the night whenever we pass a huddled form sleeping, with its bundle round it, on a doorstep. The old Royalty Theatre, in Dean Street and one of the dressing rooms of Drury Lane, itself, have the reputation of being haunted. By whom? Lupino Lane, in his fascinating autobiography, says that it was Dan Leno whom he saw peering over his shoulder in the mirror. But can we be certain? Kean, in his time, had played every part in the harlequinade.

If we regard his hardships and his history as a necessary part of his image, it is because they were essential to his predestination. He was the romantic actor of the generation of Keats and Shelley and Byron. Classical repose would not be in the picture of that time. It would be impossible to imagine Kean drinking tea with Dr. Johnson on a green lawn outside a classical pavilion, by the side of the young Thames, as in the picture painted of Garrick by Zoffany. Nor can we see him, as in the portrait of Garrick by Gainsborough, on the wooded slope of Prior Park, with the Palladian bridge far down in the valley below. Any picture of Kean would have to be painted in the colours of blood and fire, with the dagger and the poison cup, the clanking chains and the headsman's block for furniture. It may be that

## SPANGLED PRINTS

the best background for his acting was the prison cell; but, equally, he shone upon the battlefield, in green or silver armour, tinselled. As an actor he belonged to the school of violence; a company in which, as well as those poets that have been named, would be found such men as Berlioz, Delacroix and Chopin. They, too, liked the shedding of blood and the fire of burning cities. And at the other end of the scale, but sitting, we may be certain, in the front row of stalls, would be 'Monk' Lewis, Mrs. Radcliffe, and, in the gallery, Petrus Borel and the French Romantic poets of the 'thirties. It was a whole school of horror, or terribilit ; but in Kean, its best and one of its earliest protagonists, the genius of the individual gave convincing truth to his excesses.

We can, now, assemble bit by bit the background to his playing. It is still to be found in the dark corners of lumber-rooms and in secondhand shops. There is a gleam of reflected light, a flash of silver or gold, a glint of green or ruby, and the tinselled print comes out. The actors are ever in preposterous attitudes, always threatening with sword or pistol, more often still with halberd or falchion. They are mounted upon a stallion which has been reined up as if with a sudden shock of terror, or they stand on foot against a background of raging seas or glaciers. Sometimes it is the Tyrol and its wooden chalets, Scotland and its glens, a town of oriental domes for *Timour the Tartar*, or a Gothic castle, cut out of cardboard like a child's fortress, on a green baize lawn. They wear plated armour, or fight on foot in kilts, or as corsairs or Greek brigands. The figures from the harlequinade are never far away. Grimaldi sings 'Hot Codlins'; Mrs. Sarah Lane, the grandmother or great-aunt of our Lupino Lane, plays her guitar in her short red skirt; and the Hunter of the Alps, or Sir Glorion, the Blood Red Knight, rub shoulders, with a clanking sound, against pantaloons and a dozen different harlequins, all of whom, were we to enquire, would be found a few years later dying of starvation, or in the workhouse. The scenery is grand and gorgeous, painted



## THE LITTLE CHIMNEY SWEEP

with a splendour which, so late as the 'sixties, was to surprise and astonish a French visitor M. Francis Wey, who wrote an excellent book on his impressions of London. He says that the Christmas pantomimes, especially at the Old Surrey Theatre, were upon a scale of splendour and fantasy that had still something of the Elizabethan theatre in its tradition, and that this was the pleasure, or hallucination, of the poorest fog-bound slums of Lambeth.

All this violence of colour and image had its origin in the acting of Kean, of whom, indeed, there are many portraits among the tinselled prints. He led: and other plays, and then the pantomimes, followed ponderously behind. The prints, for all their crudity, are imbued with every trick and gesture of his acting. And, in the same way that glamour is lent to his name by the atrocity of his hardships, so part of the poetry in this tinsel is in the knowledge that the men and women who acted against these lavish backgrounds were paid the scantiest of wages, and that the plays, in themselves, were the only escape or illusion of the poor people and children, who crowded to watch them. It was the worst epoch of the industrial age: there has never been such poverty, or such a drabness of life. Worst of all was the child labour. Little boys and girls worked for most of the hours of day and night, amid every surrounding of ugliness that cupidity and carelessness could design for them. The little chimney sweep worked in his hellish funnel of soot, and met, soon enough, with his particular death of cancer of the scrotum. They had to rise at the coldest and darkest hour of night in order to work in the chimneys when the fires were extinguished. Even so, high up in the chimney, the soot was often burningly hot and their cruel masters would even light a fresh fire under their feet in order to drive them up and up. Nearly always they were tightly wedged in and had to be pulled down by the legs. These workhouse waifs were continually and mercilessly beaten by their masters, and in order to harden them were never allowed to wash off the soot with which they were

## THE LITTLE CHIMNEY SWEEP

encrusted. The cancer from which they generally died was the direct result of this. In the *Little Chimney Sweeper's Friend*, a magazine published by the philanthropist to whose credit is chiefly due the abolition of these horrors, there are some appalling stories of the chimney sweepers of Lambeth, and, in the midst of this, that lovely and pathetic poem, 'The Chimney Sweeper', by William Blake, who lived, then, in Lambeth. Its innocence and its breath of heaven are compounded in curious measure of the highest accents of poetry and of the very intonation of the Lambeth slums. It is unbearable not to quote the whole poem:

When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry "weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"  
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head  
That curl'd, like a lamb's back, was shav'd: so I said  
'Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair'.

And so he was quiet and that very night,  
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!—  
That thousand of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned and Jack,  
Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black.

And by came an angel who had a bright key,  
And he opened the coffins and set them all free:  
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,  
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;  
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
He'd have God for his father, and never want joy.

## GREENACRE

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,  
And got with our bags and our brushes to work,  
Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm;  
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.

The poignancy of this poem in that particular setting becomes almost more than the nerves can stand, especially when we consider the last stanza in which it is expressed that there is yet no comfort for the poor little things, that they have to work again that very night, and every night. But, as we have said, it reads like a breath of heaven in its dreadful setting. That was Lambeth: and not Lambeth, only, but every other part of London. It is no wonder that the joys of the poor people took on a somewhat ferocious tinge, that they loved melodrama, crudities of blood and terror, and the cheap beauties of tinsel.

It is to be remarked, though, that among that section of them who could afford to go to plays Shakespeare was known as he has never been since. Every playgoer could quote from Shakespeare. Before we leave the black purlieus of Lambeth it is well to recall that the murderer Greenacre, from the horror of whose circumstances we can, perhaps, gather a little strength for our task, made as recondite and dramatic a quotation from Shakespeare as could be expected of any scholar. Greenacre murdered his wife: he dismembered and burnt her body: her head he could not dispose of and threw into the canal, where it floated down, catching in weir after weir with its long hair, while he came back every morning and released it to travel down a little farther between the tall houses on every side. Eventually he came and took it away, wrapped in paper in a bag. He got with it into a horse omnibus, nearly fainting away with horror when the conductor called out 'sixpence a head!' It was Greenacre who kept a little shop in Lambeth, and when Miss Siddal was a child used to carry her across the road in his arms, inspiring in her such a presentiment of horror that her morbid imagination could never forget him in later life. When the condemned ser-

## TITLES OF PLAYS

mon was preached to this murderer, on the night before his execution, coming into the chapel and seeing it empty and lit with candles, he called out: 'My God! Hell's on fire.'<sup>1</sup> It is easy to see that Greenacre was an admirable audience for melodrama, even if it is not true that he had actually been an actor, himself.

So we leave Lambeth for the nearer bank of the river and come back, once more, to the district lying between Drury Lane and Leicester Square. This is the historic ground for our enquiry and there is no need to look outside its limits. The suburban theatres were but the reflection, at a distance, of what was played behind these doors. *Macbeth* or *Hamlet*, from the west end, were given on horseback in the equestrian drama, the circus riders having learnt their gestures and their dramatics from Drury Lane. *Mazeppa*, that is to say, was played with the fervour and intensity of *Lear* or *Othello*; and few more curious spectacles than Astley's equestrian drama can ever have been given. But, speaking of the spangled drama as a whole, the very titles of the plays are sufficient indication of what to expect. *Timour the Tartar*, *Hyder Ali*, *Korastikan*, *Baghvan Ho!*, *The Corsair*, *Casco Bay or the Mutineer*, *Black-eyed Susan*, *Cherry and Fair Star*, *The Dismal Swamp*, *The Elephant of Siam or the Fire Fiends*, *The Giant Horse*, *Hag of the Lake*, *The Hunter of the Alps*, *The Maid and the Maggie*, *The Blood-red Knight or the Fatal Bridge*, *The Giant of the Blue Mountains*, *Seven Wonders of the World or Harlequin Colossus*, *The Skeleton Horseman*, *Harlequin and the Swans*, *Harlequin and Red Dwarf*, *Harlequin in Holland*, *Harlequin and Hero*, these are names of some of the plays. It is the Romantic Age in its most lurid colours, painted so bright to satisfy a morbid craving. The same age was at work in their creation which produced the *Symphonie Fantastique*, *Lélio ou le retour à la vie*, *The Massacre of Chio*, many other masterpieces of Berlioz

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. 'I think the devil will not have me damned lest the oil that is in me should set hell on fire.' This information is drawn from Violet Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti*, 1932.

## A THEATRICAL COSTUMIER

and Delacroix, Weber's Operas, the sham Gothick castles, and poems and novels without number.

Only a step or two from St. Martin's Lane, and on the way to Drury Lane Theatre, in Long Acre, next door to the Garrick Club, in very midst of that part of London with which we are concerned, there is to be found a theatrical costumier's shop which must contain the finest collection in existence of the spangled or tinselled prints. The shop, itself, is one of the most delightful interiors of London, a dark and immense room crowded with pantomime masks, costumes, stage armour, and every kind and manner of theatrical superfluity. The writer spent two whole afternoons looking over this collection with Diaghilew, who bought the only remaining heroic breastplate of these plays, fiercely glittering in its strips of glass, tinkling like a chandelier, and very heavy.<sup>1</sup> Two entire small rooms, or offices, are hung with the prints, which were made and tinselled, seventy or eighty years ago, by the aged proprietor's father, a few of them, even, being the work of his own hands, when a small child, working under his father's direction.

In these two little rooms a forgotten world comes to life again under the eyes. And this collection of prints is remarkable, perhaps, chiefly for the beauty of its women who, generally speaking, received but scant courtesy from the artist. The peacock splendours of the tinsel seem to have been bestowed more upon men than women. But here, and here alone, there are unforgettable ballerinas sailing to shore in Neptune's chariot upon the waves, or dressed like figures from the contemporary *Mdlle. de Maupin*, in plumed cavalier hats, with short tinselled tunics and Amazonian legs. Their lovers, or tyrants, are in tartan kilts or gilt armour; they wear Scotch bonnets, a plumed helmet or a turban. All are armed to the teeth, and heavily whiskered and mustachio'd. All are dealing death blows, or receiving them. There are, also, many harlequins, or Mercurys,

<sup>1</sup>This was worn in *The Triumph of Neptune*, and, in later seasons, in *Aurora's Wedding*. It is being worn at Covent Garden as this is written.

## SCENERY

running messages or deep in intrigue. Pantaloon is like an old and creeping Jewish miser; and there are clowns, in variety, who have robbed the butcher's shop and hold a heart and a hambone, or a string of sausages.

The richness of this people's pleasure defies description. And not the least fascinating part of the prints is in their hint of the painted scenery behind the actors. There are oriental palaces worthy of Lalla Rookh, haunted castles more suggestive than Hohenschwangau or than Leap Castle, apotheoses or transformations worthy of the last act of a ballet by Tchaikowsky, Venetian archways for the moonlight barcarolle, and fantastical scenes which have no existence and no reason away from the extravaganza for which they were created. There is the blasted heath, the bleak tower of King Lear, and Othello's loggia or arcade open upon the Canal. And, as well, there are the coral arches of Neptune's palace rising up in the calm ocean, Tritons sounding conches, and double fountains spouted by whales. There is the nautical drama, in prussian blue upon the boarded deck, with sailors in pigtails, and the Union Jack at the mast-head. *The Corsican Brothers*, a drama of revenge, has every cavern and dark corner of the forest; *The Lord Mayor's Fool* is like a fantasy upon the City merchant, his turtle soup, the aldermen in the State barge, the happy watermen and clown drawn in a tub by swans; and there are scenes that show the influence of Sir Walter Scott and might be the background for such operas as *La Donna del Lago* or *Lucia di Lammermoor*. There is no theme in all the paraphernalia of the Romantics which has not its counterpart in this choice of drama. It is the Romantic repertory as made use of by every poet, painter or musician of the time.

This school of violence, of which Kean was protagonist, gave its stimulus to the lurid colours of the scene. Melodrama and extravaganza were given their encouragement by this emphasis on the dreadful and macabre. The spectacular drama appears, nearly for the first time, typically enough, in *Timour the Tartar*

## SCENERY

which was specially written by 'Monk' Lewis in order to allow the introduction of troops of horse into the oriental splendour of the scenery. This play is the remote descendant of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. 'Monk' Lewis was a rich amateur and poetaster of the time, so that the play has a more aristocratic ancestry than most of the popular drama and reflects the prevalent taste of the day. But *Timour the Tartar* is an exception. The other plays are even more stilted and ridiculous in their diction. All that mattered was the display of violence and the scenery. Therefore, it can be said that the acting of Kean and the principles of his genius had this posthumous blaze of its appropriate colours. It is to be argued, indeed, that the scenic splendours of these plays represent the greatest heights to which imaginative scenery has ever attained. The best talent of the time must have been employed upon their execution. It is only necessary to turn over the sheets of *Aladdin*, still sold by Mr. H. J. Webb, or his son, at their 'Juvenile and Theatrical Print Shop', in Hoxton, to be convinced of this fact. *Aladdin* was the Drury Lane Pantomime of 1865; and, even so late as that year, the scenery was of a rare fantasy and invention. By then, the period of which we are speaking, was nearly over. Its climax was in the 'thirties and 'forties of last century, when melodrama and extravaganza were in their prime. Not only the words, but the music of the plays was of no moment. All the concern of the management was for the scene painting. An extraordinary degree of realism in fantasy was reached.

The eastern architecture, of no known genus, it is true, but taking its origin, as it were, from the domes and chandeliers of the Pavilion at Brighton, succeeds in the creation of a real Orient of the imagination. Their forest scenes, of the *Frei-schütz* kind, are inimitable; but best of all, perhaps, must have been the street scene, the drop cloth with a row of shops against which the harlequinade was played. These are the sublimation of a London Street, in a sort of imaginative fantasy upon the necessary shops, the butcher, baker, hosier, pawn-

## SCENERY

broker of everyday life. It was in front of these painted drops that Grimaldi played, for Grimaldi created the clown in the form that he has come down to us, originating his peculiar gait and his high-pitched voice. *Harlequin and Blue Beard*, *Harlequin and the Forty Virgins* (all at Sadler's Wells), *Harlequin and the Swans* (at Covent Garden); these are some of the pantomimes in which Grimaldi took part; and his companion in adventure was nearly always his friend Bologna, who played Harlequin. Indeed, as the names of the plays indicate, Harlequin was the hero. It was thanks to his magic bat that, in the transformation scene, the heroine would be changed into Columbine and the wicked baron transformed into Pantaloon. And then, for the final harlequinade, the street scenes would be lowered. The 'tricks' would come on, which were performed by means of falling flaps of scenery. A golden egg would turn into a goose; or a drunkard into a beer-barrel. The clown, or some other character, would be pursued and the chase would go on through street after street of shops, all with punning names, as in the game of 'happy family', inscribed above their windows. Huge sugarloaves and tea caddies could be stolen from the grocer; bales of cloth from the haberdasher; and hats, loaves of bread, strings of sausages, every variety of article in pawn from the shop in question. The traps were much in use for springing out or disappearing from the stage; while the jumps and falls undertaken were so severe, as we know from the experience of Kean himself, and also from the life of Grimaldi, that broken limbs and permanent crippling were often the result.

Over all these incidents and scenes the spirit of George Cruikshank is cast; who designed the scenery and costumes for several plays and drew many theatrical prints, being, as well, a most assiduous playgoer and a natural enthusiast for this kind of drama. And even more close is its association with his brother Robert Cruikshank. This neglected artist seems to have lived for the theatre as his chief interest. He reproduces the atmosphere of these pieces with an amazing fidelity, or it is probable



## CRUIKSHANK OR SHARAKU

that they were, in turn, influenced by him. It is known that he was much employed upon their scenery and dresses; and it is certain that in his theatrical prints, so saturated are they with the spirit of melodrama and extravaganza, he comes near to being the Sharaku of the London stage. They bear, in fact, more than a superficial resemblance to that Japanese specialist in theatrical portraiture. Their violent and threatening attitudes, their grimacing faces are to be compared; while the background of silver or mica with which the prints of Sharaku were embellished find their equivalent in the tinsel colours applied to Cruikshank's prints by amateurs who bought them for this purpose. The bold and astonishing patterns of Sharaku's dresses, their stripes and quilts, the explosion of their rayed petals, the raised lines of their *gaufage*, tally with the punching and stamping of the dies, through and into the tinsel, so that it is not so much Robert Cruikshank, alone, who is the equal of Sharaku, but Robert Cruikshank plus the enthusiasm of those who attended the melodrama and went home determined to emulate its effects. This sort of choral or community finish has but seldom been the completion to a work of art and the oddness of this circumstance puts the tinselled or spangled prints into a category by themselves, in which we can hear the hisses and groans given to the villain, our hearts flutter at the heroine or to the strumming of her mandoline, and we see the bright scenery and hear the high voices of the clowns.

There is no need, in fact, to travel beyond the scene. We have established the frantic lengths to which this drama was prepared to go in order to gather in the pennies or shillings of its public. The actors met with bruises and broken limbs and, if they did not die in the wretchedness of the workhouse, we have seen how, in the most conspicuous instance, success was more than the nerves could stand and the actor in question went down in an inferno of drink. His early life combines the act of starving in huge cities, and the town has to be as big as London or Paris or New York for this purpose, with the brutalities of the bull

## HARLEQUINADE

fight. In the end this great actor drinks himself to death, accomplishing the due curve or parabola of his life in a manner which would never have been possible in a successful old age. In the end of the piece the villain has to be applauded and, perhaps, the hero hissed. It is, therefore, the perfect trajectory of a tragedian to live and die in this way; and he should be envied more than pitied in his fall.

The traditional proscenium doors, to either side of the stage, which are painted green and given doorknob and knocker just like the front door of a house, open wide for the actors to take their call before the curtain. And the stage comes out level with the boxes so that the actors are half in the theatre and not set back and framed, as it were, in a space behind the orchestra. They cross the stage from door to door to take their calls; but the curtain goes up, in midst of this, for the harlequinade.

It is, first of all, a bare room with empty chairs and sofas painted on the backcloth. A crowd of clowns and augusts come on from the wings and the joke consists in taking the 'principals' by the arm, with a show of deferential politeness, offering them a seat and pushing them down into the painted furniture so that they sprawl upon the boards. They get up, covered with dust, and are helped and hurried off the scene. Immediately, there is a creaking of ropes, the room lifts and a street of shops comes down. As the clowns stand in front of this, some of them with knave-like ruffs and doublets, with hearts and spades and diamonds on their dresses, they shuffle like a pack of cards or form into suits below the punning names of the butchers and pawnbrokers painted upon the shops.

But this is only the flash of a minute, only a momentary resemblance, for their 'business' begins. They steal the tea chests from the grocer; from the tailor, a bale of cloth, of black or mourning cloth hanging from a nail, with which they entangle and trip each other up; and they make a butter slide in front of the grocer's. They dress up a clown as an undertaker's mute and send him sliding to the floor. A clown comes on leading a pig,

## NIGHTMARE CHASE

while they draw out strings of sausages from the butcher's window. Another clown plays the bones in front of the public-house at the corner. A top hatted policeman appears from the right; and Harlequin, who jumps out from a first-floor window labelled 'Room to Let' strikes him with his bat, he turns into the wicked baron and the pursuit begins.

It is phantasmagoria of the poorest streets, all shown as comical in their poverty. The insufficient oil lamps give a fictitious light and shade to the scene. Once and again there is a 'drop' on which the real shops of the neighbourhood are painted as advertisement, and we see the theatrical print seller, his prints and miniature stage in the window, and sheets of tinsel and tinfoil. Perhaps the false scenes are brighter and less poverty stricken. One or two of the shops are run by harlequin, whose name and portrait appear above the door. He runs out and sells objects which turn immediately into something else. These mercurial changes are nearly always to the buyer's disadvantage. A purse becomes a sieve with sand running through it; the green apples that he sells are so sour that they turn the stomach; or a magical bat or wand, like his own, is no better than a policeman's truncheon and its cardboard crumples at a blow. There is a chimney sweep, and his apprentices are little black boys with marks of the miller's flour upon them in place of soot. In the butcher's shop a pig's carcase which is being cut up turns into a clown. The loaves tumble out of the baker's as if the live mice were nibbling inside them and were hungry enough to run away with the bread. A bull, with two men in it, breaks every bit of china in the china shop. A barrow of oranges is upset and the golden balls roll all over the stage, next door to the pawnbroker, who looks up at his sign and counts the watches in his window. There is no peace for anyone and the humour is always someone else's loss or discomfiture. Clowns break in through the canvas doors and jump back again on to the stage through the shop-windows, spoiling everything. Flower women, sitting with their baskets at the foot of a lamp post, drop down out of

## NIGHTMARE CHASE

sight in the trap and a clown comes up instead. A huge cradle with a crying clown for baby turns into a coffin on trestles. Nothing has any fixed identity and will only turn into something worse, wherein the humour lies.

It is the cold heart of the slums. But no self-pity is to be seen in any of the signs of its poverty. 'Eat or be eaten' is the motto of the mean streets. This is the education of their children, and any child in the story is sure to be beaten by his master or parents and sent supperless to bed. This is one of the only jokes the old can play on the young, and it never fails. But, by now, the harlequinade has rushed through the streets to a sort of mart or 'world's end'. It is the open market or Seven Dials of the district, and the culminating scene before the transformation. They chase the wicked baron in and out through the market stalls, in which nothing can remain unbroken or not upset from its place. They catch him and, to the touch of Harlequin's bat, he changes to the young prince of the fairy story and the transformation comes down.

At this moment we hear a loud and passionate voice declaiming in the wings. It rises and falls amid the Dickensian Cockney of the stage-hands. It has shuddering and vibrant tones of horror and it appears to soliloquize, and waits, now and then, for its answer.

He comes on through the left proscenium door; a short dark, or grey-dark man, in black armour, helmetless. He seems to see nothing, and rants to himself from left to right across the stage. He limps in both legs but an electrical thrill, or emanation, comes out from him, as if from his bones, and communicates itself to every corner of the house. In a moment he has gone; and then we remember that nothing, indeed, of that extraordinary man is left to us. He has perished, all but his name.

But his image relapses again into the mean streets: we see them in the dawn of a winter morning. The sweep and his terrible apprentices are the first persons abroad, while the bundles of

## THE MIDWIFE AGAIN

rags still sleep on their doorsteps. But the semi-dark lightens and it is all hours of the day in one.

A ventriloquist is teaching someone in an upstairs room. A little boy turns hoops in the streets and picks up pennies in the gutter. We see a woman come out of a house and a second woman go into another. Both are carrying bundles. One is a midwife who has delivered a child; and the other, also, has the form of a charwoman or a midwife. She is dressed in black and carries a little bag. Her tools, the instruments of her toil, are a towel, a sponge and a comb; and the friends, or relations, have to spare her a clean sheet. Her work is slow and silent, a washing of the body, a folding of the hands. And when the corpse is laid out, she, too, walks away. Below, a woman who is a hawker and itinerant actress sings and dances at the tavern door. A man comes past in ordinary clothes but with his face painted like a clown.

But, now, the noises of the theatre, which that apparition had hushed, begin again. And all that we have just seen was in the theatre and had no reality. There is the flare of Bengal fire and the smell of sulphur. Stage lightning flickers. It forks and sheets across the sky. This is the end of everything, even of artifice. A man in a breastplate of glittering glass runs before the fire. The rag-and-bone-man leaves his hand barrow and takes to his heels. A Jewish pedlar, a Shylock of the slums, with a thin red beard and wearing a pile of high hats, runs away too, or is he Pantaloon? There is no truth and nothing is certain. The canvas catches and whole palaces come roaring down in flames. Again there is that voice in the wings; but, this time, he does not come on.

The heaped accumulation of all the storms and winds and rains of the hundred years that have gone by are banging and blowing in one fearful moment. The shrieking, howling tempest cries higher than the high voices of the harlequinade. It will help no one now, to be a ventriloquist; neither can tumbling in the streets for pennies assist against the fire. And then the curtain

## FALL OF THE CURTAIN

comes down like all the masts and sails, and rigging of a ship fallen. And, having fallen, they blow and belly forth, terrifying, and, themselves, in terror.

It needs a sea of drink to drown this horror. For whom is this joke made; and who will laugh at it? The transformation is real and travesty comes true. All the errand boys, from a mile round, have come to watch the fire. It gives true glitter to the tinsel. If no one is hurt there will be no laughter. So it is a play within a play: but all that matters is that they are dead. Those who live by violence will perish by it. They died a hundred years ago, not so luridly, not in the transformation; but the favourite end for a melodrama was to go up in the flames. It is only for one evening and will be played again to-morrow. And the ventriloquist, the child harlequin and the hawker, or itinerant actress resume again. They pick up the pennies and quickly spend them. The bundles of rags stir upon the doorsteps, for it is cold and early morning.



V  
PURGATORIO





## V PURGATORIO

Out of all the infinite variety of human suffering there are some forms to be selected in which it would seem as if the victims had incurred the divine wrath. They have been caught in a trap; and their efforts to extricate themselves only involve them still further in damnation. These persons are predestined to misery: such is their necessity of existence. It is as if in this life they were paying dearly for faults committed under another personality; and our conviction that this transference of blame is an impossibility only adds pointlessness to their punishment. If, in addition, their personalities are hopeless of improvement, the divine inscrutability of their fate becomes the more impressive and the more terrible. Some have done nothing, comparatively nothing, to warrant the severity of their sentence; others have committed fearful crimes just in order to enter this earthly purgatory. But, in every case, there is no escape for them from the awful fate to which they are condemned; and if that has a set limit of years the realism of this living purgatory becomes an accomplished fact. They come forth from it broken and ruined men, bearing its marks upon them, and, nearly always, they taste its bitterness again. They throw up their free lives and, once more, go back to prison.

Such is the philosophy, or the excuse for crime. Those who have become involved in its toils are banded together in a fearful brotherhood. But the old laws of a less humane world, surviving into the period when the population began to swarm, caught the innocent with the guilty. It was sufficient to steal a shilling and your feet were in the trap. You were entered upon the fearful and hellish brotherhood of the prisons, never to

## THE LOCKING OF THE DOORS

walk again in the open air, without that miasma, that breath of horror upon your mind and body. The thought of that becomes our symbol for purgatory, or expiation. Innocent and guilty suffered together in their torment so that, in the end, from circumstance, no such thing as innocence was found. The stamp or brand of prison was upon them all.

It was during the period of greatest material prosperity that the code of conformity was most strictly enforced. It was then, we might say, that the traps were most cunningly baited. An age, whose imagination dwelt only in realism, abolished torture and invented in its stead a purgatory of perpetual silence and a system by which the unbreathed air, the fresh morning of a new world was contaminated by the scouring of our slums. There was, thus, a double or alternate purgatory: one set up in our midst, and the other sent to as far a distance from our shores as human knowledge could devise, or the limits of the world extended. The horror of both these purgatories belongs to a past age and is dead and done with: but every hell is a place of dead ghosts. It is, therefore, into the pit that we descend.

## V PURGATORIO

### I. The Hood-Beak or the Silent System

THE beginning of the Silent System can be traced to the visit of a certain Mr. W. Crawford to the United States of America, just over a hundred years ago. On his return, he published a book, in 1834, on the Penitentiaries of the U.S.A. It is significant that, even so long ago, the U.S.A. was the land of experiment and invention. More significant still is the name Penitentiary, as applied to a prison, for it implies a place of punishment. Prison means detention: but Penitentiary means repentance.

The author of this book, Mr. W. Crawford, took pains to visit every model prison that was accessible to him. He is to be imagined, dressed in black and carrying his tall hat, descending into the black infernos that he describes. Model prisons were springing up everywhere, in every State. Sometimes the experiments were too bold to succeed, and loss of life was the result. It did not matter: the reform of the prisoners was on foot. And so delighted was he with the result of his observations that, on the publication of his report, the first model or experimental prison was at once begun and in a few years the new system was at work in England.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. W. Crawford reports the following facts from the U.S.A.

<sup>1</sup>According to G. C. Ives, *A History of Penal Methods*, London, 1914, p. 182, a sum of five thousand pounds was paid to Mr. W. Crawford for his tour of inspection in America. This present book could never have been written, but for the assistance of Mr. G. C. Ives' work, and the author takes this opportunity of expressing his many obligations to the most impressive work of its kind ever penned.

## SUBTERRANEAN

In 1818, the Legislature of Pennsylvania resolved to construct a penitentiary for enforcing solitary confinement without even work. Solitude was all that mattered; or the prisoners would be contaminated by their fellows. But it was to be no luxury of idleness, for the solitary confinement was in darkness. At another prison, a trial of solitary confinement was made upon eighty convicts. In 1822, they were shut up for ten months, each in a little cell seven feet long by three and a half feet broad, and were not allowed to leave it at any time or for any purpose. At the end of this time the experiment could only be called a partial success, for more than half of the convicts were insane. And much money had been wasted, for the construction of this tomb house was a costly experiment.

In Maine, the prisoners were kept alone in underground cells, which were veritable pits, entered only by a ladder through a trap door, two feet square. The only other orifice was one at the bottom of the cell, about one and a half inches in diameter, for the admission of warm air. The warders were armed with heavy cowhide cutting whips, with authority to use them as they willed. They must have climbed down the ladder to reach to the prisoner while another warder, from above, flashed down the beam of his lantern upon the huddled body, chained and handcuffed, crouching in its corner. No complaints were allowed to the governor of this prison. The warders had supreme authority to curb and silence those committed to their care. Twice a day, but for the prisoners it was always night, food and water were carried round and the warders descending into these pits of wild beasts proceeded to tame them with the cracking of their whips.

It is probable that the most fearful of all these prisons was the Eastern Penitentiary, as described by Mr. Crawford. A prisoner, on being received into the Penitentiary, passed through three rooms for his initiation. In the first he was undressed: in the second he was cleaned by a warm bath: in the third he was attired in the prison garb and his face was covered by a hood.

## SYMBOL OF THE THREE ROOMS

This last is the point to which we shall return later; but, to continue with the ceremony of his induction, he was led, thus blindfolded, into the presence of the prison warden who admonished him and prepared him for his doom. He was, then, taken to his cell and left there in solitude. For the first few days he had neither books nor occupation of any kind and was left to meditate in silence and to remember his own familiar world that he had left behind. The cell was twelve feet by seven, and elongated with a peculiar effect of horror into a funnel-like height of sixteen feet, at the top of which a small grated window let in a little light. Eventually, when his spirit was broken, he was taken out for half an hour's daily exercise into a stone yard, or more strictly speaking a stone tank, for it was only eighteen feet by eight, and surrounded on every side by an eleven foot high stone wall. We are told, also, that the prisoners in the cells of the upper storeys never went out at all.

This Eastern Penitentiary was regarded by Mr. Crawford as the masterpiece of the new system. The ceremony of initiation has, indeed, a dread and solemn terror to its procedure. The successive symbolism of the three rooms to be passed through by each prisoner was a stroke of dramatic genius on the part of its inventor. The casting off of the clothes or trappings of ordinary life: the cleansing or purification by water: the investiture with the felon's distinctive dress: the hiding of the face in a cowl or mask: the speech from the governor or king of this underworld: the days of silence for meditation and to allow misery to grow: and the exercise of the body in circle after circle round that stone tank, these details have a great or epical horror which must have broken the most rebellious will.

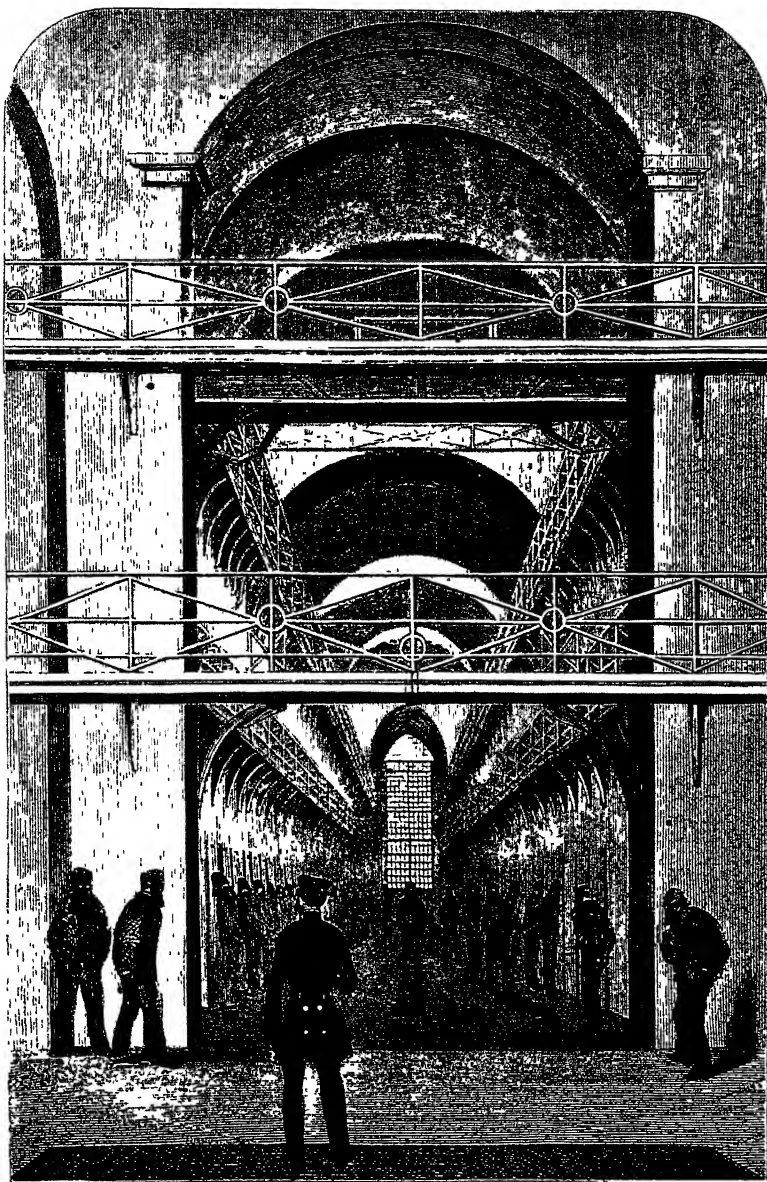
As advocated by Mr. Crawford, the principles of this reform were solitude and silence. The prisoners were to be kept apart from each other. They were forbidden to speak or communicate by signs. The rules of the Trappists were enforced upon them. They were dieted like monks; and, like monks, they were locked in solitude into their cells for contemplation and repen-

tance. Prison was to be, not a place for improvement, but a cell for punishment: and the world of handcuffed men and women waited, motionless, for they could not resist.

But here we are in advance of our subject, for it has to be related that as soon as the Report upon the Penitentiary of the United States was published it was at once resolved to construct model prisons upon the same lines in England.<sup>1</sup> Of these, the chief were Millbank and Pentonville; and it is probable that these model prisons were the occasion of more prolonged human misery than the famous prisons of the Inquisition which did, at least, bring a chance of death, however painful, to the poor wretches who were its victims. But such model prisons as Millbank and Pentonville were designed so as to make it certain that the prisoners lived through their sentences. And, of course, in these English prisons, the worst horrors of their American original, the darkness and the uncontrolled punishment by the warders, were not allowed. At the same time, the strictly regulated inhumanity is almost more terrible.<sup>2</sup> The dark cell was in constant use, sometimes for two or three months on end, if the convict was obstinate and unrepentant. Some dreadful instances

<sup>1</sup>Pentonville Prison was finished in 1842. Within the next six years fifty-four new prisons were built in England. According to Mr. G. C. Ives, *A History of Penal Methods*, London, 1914, p. 186: 'At Pentonville the isolation theory was carried out with all the ardour of a new religion under the personal watchfulness of Mr. Crawford who had become an inspector of prisons, and who died suddenly within the prison he was regulating, in 1847. In this "solitary system", for long periods, for two years at the beginning, and, later, for eighteen months, every man was kept in isolation from his fellow convicts.'

<sup>2</sup>In his *Penitentiaries of the United States* (1834), Mr. W. Crawford, speaking of certain English prisons, observes: 'When labour is imposed, its corrective influence is lost from the absence of constant inspection and means of restraint. Silence, although nominally enjoined, is not scrupulously maintained, and prisoners are not, as they ought invariably to be, prohibited from looking off their work and gazing at various objects in the wards and yards.' This stern moralist demands that the prisoners should never speak, or even glance round, and that they should be watched by visible and invisible warders, in the latter case by the aid of spy-holes in the walls. Cf. G. C. Ives, *A History of Penal Methods*, London, 1914, p. 182.



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INTERIOR OF THE SURREY HOUSE OF  
CORRECTION, WANDSWORTH, WITH THE  
PRISONERS TURNING OUT AFTER DINNER



*(Mayhew and Binny, 1864)*





## BULL RING

of this and other horrors are to be found, dispassionately related, in the writings of the Chaplain of Millbank, the appropriately named Rev. Daniel Nihil, who noted everything from the point of view of the stern moralist.

Pentonville Prison, the other Penitentiary, is a most peculiar object in the plan. It had five wings and can be described as a capital letter Y, but tilted to one side,  with a straight line through the junction of its arms, thus . The peculiar circles in between its arms are the walled-in exercise yards of the convicts which, in the plan, correspond exactly to the bull rings on the map of some town in Spain. The interior corridors of this prison are well described as a bunch of Burlington Arcades, five in number, and fitted with staircases and galleries of perforated metal. It may be surmised that, as in the staircases of some nightmare of escape and capture, certain of these galleries and flights of stairs are accessible only to the warders. The transverse galleries are short cuts from side to side of the corridor, part of a system running openly and without concealment under their eyes but upon which the convicts could never set foot. It is the *Carcere* of Piranesi translated into iron and cement.

There is a description of an early morning visit to this prison undertaken in the 'sixties of last century. The narrators rose from their beds long before the light and drove through the mean and meaner streets of London, towards Pentonville, passing on the way the early street coffee-stall keeper with his large coffee-cans dangling from either end of a yoke across his shoulders, and the red fire shining through the holes of the firepan beneath, like spots of crimson foil. The cabmen at the nearest stand were still asleep inside their rickety old broughams. They passed a butcher's light 'chay cart', with the name painted on the side, hurrying off to the early meat market, and the men huddled in the bottom of the vehicle, behind the driver, with their coat collars turned up, dozing as they went. Next came some tall and stalwart brewer's draymen, in their dirty drab flushing

## BULL RING

jackets and leathern leggings, hastening towards the brewery; some railway porters making for the early trains at King's Cross; and, at some long distance after them, an old ragged crone, tottering on her way to the Farringdon watercress market, with her 'shallow' under her arm, and her old rusty frayed shawl drawn tight round her; whilst, here and there, they saw a stray bone-grubber, or 'pure' finder, in his shiny, grimy tatters, routing among the muckheaps for rags and refuse. They could hear the heavy single knock, followed by the shrill cry of the chimney sweep, echoing through the desolate streets, as he waited at some door near by and shrieked 'Swe-e-e-p' to rouse the sleeping cook maid. This part of London, even now, is still the London of Cruikshank and in those days the shabby gentility of some of those stucco terraces and parades will have seemed more real still in the beginnings of the light. It was just before six o'clock when they arrived in front of the castellated gate of the prison, in time to see a batch of convicts, who had been woken, specially, before the others, released into the cold air. They were free men again; and stood together in a knot, as if undecided what to do next, wearing their civilian suits which had been given back to them, and which some of them, we may suppose, had not seen for seven or twelve years. Liberty must have lost much of its sweetness, so long deliberated, in this rebirth into the world. But Messrs. Mayhew and Binny, our two guides, have passed into the prison enclosure and as they reach the main door, where the warders are waiting to show them round, the prison clock strikes six and the clapper of a towncrier's large bell clatters through the building. Immediately, with a din and a rattle, the prison comes to life. To many men this must have been the most awful hour of the day. They had been woken by the bugle a quarter of an hour earlier, in order to dress and make their beds, and were now waiting, fully dressed, in their cells. Several warders, each with a bunch of jangling keys in his hand, went along the corridors from cell to cell, turning the locks as they went, with a noise that resounded

## THE HOOD-BEAK

through the long, empty corridors like the clicking of so many musket triggers. When all were unlocked the prisoners came forth from their cells. Up till now it has been the stirrings of life in the prison: now it is alive and moving. Each prisoner stands still, like a ghost, in the doorway of his cell, so that at a glance all can be seen present and obedient to their duty. But this is the horror, though it struck no responsive note in the hearts of our two guides: every prisoner is masked or cowed. It is the Hood-Beak.

It is to this hood or mask that we return. This is among the most fiendish inventions of the moralist. Its purpose was to prevent recognition. One convict could not know another save by the number upon his disk or badge. All through their lives in prison they remained a number and nothing more. All talking was forbidden and they worked, or passed each other by, in silence. The novice could not distinguish another novice from the convict who had passed twelve or fifteen years of his life in prison. Their identity in this way was uncontaminated; and when they came out their fellow convicts would not recognize them for they had not seen their features. This was the theory; but, in practice, the hooding or masking of the convicts became one of the worst instruments for their repression. They never caught a glimpse of the human features of their fellow prisoners, but only the black or grey shadows of their cowls, passing in silence. From the point of view of authority this masking of the face put the convicts almost completely into their power. The hood could only be discarded when the convict was alone in his cell. The merest lifting of a flap or corner of the hood, in public, was visited with an immediate flogging and solitary confinement in a darkened cell upon bread and water.

But, by now, the convicts are at large along the corridors. All have their appointed tasks and move directly to them by long habit. Some, still in their cowls, are upon their hands and knees, scrubbing the floors. Others carry up the breakfast, the mugs of cocoa, the loaves and the dripping. There is no prison

## SISYPHUS AND THE LEADEN STONE

dining room or refectory: they eat and drink in their cells. And, when this is done, the serious work of the day begins; they march off to the workshops. They pick the proverbial oakum: they sew the coarse and heavy sackcloth for the postmen's bags: some of them, who are upon the hardest labour, have the disheartening and useless task of rolling heavy cannon balls about the yard; or they scrape the shot, another labour worthy of Sisyphus, for it is endless, useless and of unappreciable difference after hour upon hour of work. And all is done in silence: no one speaks. So the day continues: there is dinner, they go to work again, and, at last, are locked in their cells once more with an idle hour, monklike, for the contemplation of their sorrows.

Such was prison life, broken only by Sundays; but, again, the mask, or hood-beak demands our attention. The sight of all these men, dressed uniformly in the prison garb, in brownish or yellowish cloth with the mark of the broad arrow upon them, makes the population of these nightmare passages, these corridors of perforated iron. They move along quickly, so as not to be summoned for laziness, but in unmilitary, in disconsolate slovenliness. There is that about the back of a person's shoulders which tells you whether he is in health and happy. Here, it is listless and hopeless, sunk in despair, but terrorized into quickness and briskness of step. They dare not stop or slacken: and every here and there are the warders watching them, who know their faces in the secrecy of the cells and can use this knowledge to track them down to punishment. The hood only hides them from their fellow men: not from the warders.

But, perhaps, the most effective moment in which to view this gathering of the damned was on a Sunday, in the prison chapel. Such was the terror of the authorities lest the prisoners should have any chance of communicating with each other that they were at the pains and expense of building a chapel of the most elaborate design in order to circumvent any possibility of this collusion. The chapel was surrounded with tier above tier of little wooden boxes, little coffins standing on their ends,

## AT WORSHIP

each holding one convict in his cowl. In no instance was the interior of one of these boxes visible from any other: but all could see the preacher, for their boxes were orientated in that direction; and on high chairs or platforms in their midst sat the warders, who could see into every box. Each warder had his section to oversee with all those cowed heads and, we may surmise, the collective force of their hatred, turned in his direction. Not even could those hidden mouths utter the blasphemies they would have wished; for, though each figure was alike and unrecognizable, his number was painted above his head and the slightest sound or movement betrayed him. Whether the convicts joined in the hymns, or not, we are not told. Their sullen and forbidding silence will have been impressive; and, no less so, their muffled voices singing through their masks.

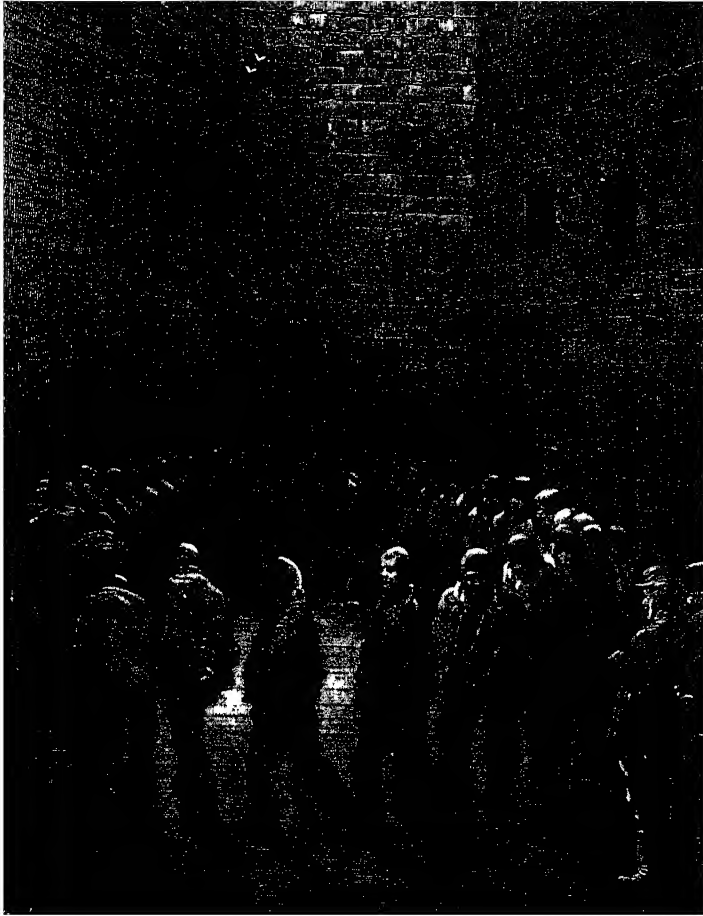
It is true, in fact, that this chapel bore the appearance of a theatre, and, also, of a menagerie of wild beasts. It is a subject that should have been painted by some master of the grotesque: a Callot, a Goya, a Magnasco. Only that minority of the convicts who had become weakminded as a result of their imprisonment can have taken any pleasure in the religious service. The ministrations of the Rev. Daniel Nihil, or his like, must have been among the most hated moments of their long detention. This person, indeed, as the preacher of a condemned sermon, takes on an almost epical importance as the servant of hypocrisy. The sermon would be propounded on a Sunday evening, with the morning of Black Monday to follow, after a long last night upon the plank bed. Such were special occasions, made memorable by the tolling of the prison bell, but even an ordinary and uneventful Sunday service was like a vision of the damned. And, after it was ended, the convicts filed away in silence back to their cells. In half an hour all was darkness, except for the lights in the corridor: for, in winter, the convicts had no light in their cells after 6 p.m. and were left in darkness until morning.

There is an alternative horror where the prisons for women

## MASKED VESTALS

are concerned, for they, also, were masked. They must have looked like penitents of some strict and invisible sisterhood. Their prison dress could be described as half Quakeress and half Charity child. The regulation boots, and the stock sizes of their dresses which did not fit, made nearly as deep an impression upon the beholder as the mask which covered their faces. It had, also, of course, a hint of the Orient, of the black veils of the Tuareg, of the odalisques of the lattice; but as if the purposes of this concealment were bent to infernal ends, or into a penitence which was harsh and degrading. The vixen or the harpy behind the mask had red and rough hands, red and chapped from washing and scrubbing, and rough from work; her nails or talons were blunted, were worn down by the hard boards. For their Sunday recreation it was not considered necessary to segregate them to the same extent as the men, and they sat together in chapel upon long, backless benches, under the eyes of the matrons. But the female convicts wore their masks in chapel; and we are told that the high treble of their voices, for they sang with enthusiasm, sounded grotesque and peculiar coming from those hidden faces.

We return, though, to the male purgatory or prison. The more desperate character of its inmates, the fact that they were the bulls or stallions of the criminal race, made the stone walls thicker and for heavier chains. And we repair, at once, to those curious rings or circles upon the plan. It has been said that they presented the exact appearance of a bull ring, of a Plaza de Toros as marked upon the map of some Spanish town, and that they were, in truth, the yards or exercise grounds of the convicts. It is now that we enter upon the most dramatic spectacle in prison life. We see the convicts at exercise, driven round and round the prison yard. This is the Dantesque walk or circle. The sight of it inspired Gustave Doré to one of the most dramatic of his drawings and this, in turn, was copied and even heightened in drama by no less an artist than Van Gogh. The design is that of the Dantesque walk or circle. Round and round



PRISONERS AT EXERCISE, BY GUSTAVE DORÉ





## FORMS OF THE HOOD-BEAK

and round they shuffle. This drawing was done at a later period when the masks had been discarded, so that a warder could speak to the persons visiting the prison of each pair of bowed shoulders and you could wait for them to come round again and try to read their past history and their present thoughts out of their sullen and despairing features. There are drawings, also, of the juvenile offenders, of the boys from seven years old and upwards, and already in that circle of the damned. The small stature of these dreadful children will have made this more imposing in hopelessness. For it was nearly a certainty that all of these children would come back again and again to prison and spend most of their lives in gaol. The bestial ugliness of most of them made it difficult to feel any pity for them. They were born or predestined to this end: and it was an end which came to them almost at the beginning of their lives.

Even so, the full horror of this sight must be related back a very few years to the time when the adult prisoners wore their masks at exercise. And now it must be said that the hood or mask had various forms. It could be the peak of a brown cloth cap immensely elongated in front, somewhat in the manner of the leather caps worn by London coalheavers, in a long peak falling over their shoulders. This peak, in the case of the convicts, could be turned up or down at will, and it would reach to the chin, with slits for the eyes. But there was, also, a more fearful form which was nothing less than a cowl, a cowl which came to halfway down the chest and was lit with two windows of talc. They were glass-window eyes in the hood or cowl of brown cloth. The appellation of the hood-beak belongs, then, to an amalgam of the two forms, which may have been worn simultaneously in different prisons so that a visitor would only carry away the general impression of these hoods or masks in a confusion of their two patterns. The hood applies to both forms: the beak, more particularly to that peak which could be turned up or down according to instructions. It will have

## FORMS OF THE HOOD-BEAK

looked, therefore, like a beak. But, in general, when reading of the convicts of those days, we are told that the hood-beak gave them a tragic solemnity. They were no longer the ordinary coarse-featured criminals: they had nothing vulgar or brutal about them. Their eyes shone like phosphoric lights through the sockets of a skull. They had the appearance of divers, in their coarse brown clothes and with these swollen heads. The hood-beak put them in a race apart from other men. They had hydrocephalous heads, the monstrous and swollen head of the worst form of idiot, the imbecile from birth.

Such, then, are the human forms whom we must see shuffling round and round and round the yard or tank. Each bears his number on his disk, and that is his only certain identification. Not one of them could have spoken, by lawful means, to another. All were bound to silence. Nor, in the strict application of that theory, could one prisoner know the face of another. It kept them from contamination; but, also, it barred the most wretched of comforts from them. We may wonder how long, in the present age, the sanity of a prisoner would last in these conditions. Those convicts of seventy or eighty years ago were uneducated. But few of them could read or write. The awful heaviness of the sentences to which they were condemned is scarcely to be credited. But the fascination of their own hopelessness in this hell of cold stone and masked men must have entered into their souls for, as we have said, a great many of them came back to gaol time after time and as often as their long, sentences would allow. A term of seven years, for instance, imposed for some small robbery or offence which would hardly be punished according to our modern system, and followed, as quickly as possible after release, by a further sentence of twelve years, would account for the twenty best years of a man's life; and, once this had happened, there would be no respite from prison. It would be sentence after sentence until old age. Even to this day, there are occasional cases in the newspapers of old habitual criminals who have spent thirty or more years of their

## THE DANTESQUE CIRCLE

lives in prison<sup>1</sup>; and, in the middle of last century, this was almost a universal rule, where the older criminals were concerned. It was a permanent criminal population who inhabited the prisons. They might enter upon this life at seven or eight years of age; and the prisons would be their permanent home, more than any other place on earth.

The Dantesque walk or circle takes on a new seriousness in this knowledge. The prisoners become like those ants described by the scientist Fabre, who are incessantly upon the march and who follow blindly the example of the insect just in front of them, in the sense that if some of their number are lifted on to the rim of a bowl they will tread round and round its circle for two or three days on end until they drop with fatigue; and all because the insect in front, who is the only one they can see, is doing the same thing. No alternative suggests itself to their blunted senses. They continue in the same path until they die of it. So is it with the wearers of the hood-beak. This is the truth about their whole lives; and it is expressed in symbol, or in miniature, when they tread this circle of the damned.

And there were other devices, as simple as the masking of the face, by means of which the horror of the prison was immeasurably increased. The use of frosted glass was an easy expedient. Not only the barred windows in the cells, but the windows of the corridors were made in this opaque thickness so that nothing of the outside world came through into prison, not even the forms of the clouds, or patterns of the wind. Nothing but the drops of rain became tangible against the window pane.

<sup>1</sup>As these words are written, in 1936, there is the report of a case at the London Sessions in which a prisoner, seventy-two years of age, pleads to having spent forty-six years of his life in penal servitude. His first sentence of seven years in 1879 was at the age of eighteen. 'In those days' he pleaded, 'penal servitude was worse than hell on earth.' He had received seven years penal servitude at Leeds, York and Rochester, ten years at Wakefield and the Central Criminal Court, and five years at Sheffield. Total: forty-six years penal servitude. All his crimes were shopbreaking. When Mayhew and Binny visited Pentonville they were shewn a man who had passed thirty-eight years of his life in prison, though only forty-seven years old.

## JUGGERNAUT

Such subtlety in restriction, which may have been due to stupidity more than to cruelty, must have made one of the main tortures of the weary years. In the beginning of a prison sentence it is the airs of the outside world that are poignant and sad; but their deprivation is more terrible still, for even the comfort of lying under the same sky as those you love is taken away and prison becomes the littlest and most insistent hell.

If we continue with the history of these dreadful places, it is to discover that the wearing of the hoods or masks was discontinued from about 1860. But, according to some authorities, the rigours of prison life reached to their climax during the quarter of a century that ensued. The worst time of all may have been during the 'seventies of the last century. After the garrotting scare, in the decade previous to that, greater severity was put into practice as a deterrent to the criminal population. The cat o' nine tails was allowed frequent application; heavier sentences of prison were imposed; and the regime of frosted glass came into its own.

Such was the severity of the system that convicts resorted to every conceivable device to hurt or maim themselves in order to avoid punishment. There were serious mutinies, such as that at Chatham in 1872, when, according to the evidence of the commission, the mutineers were severely flogged in spite of the mutilations they had inflicted upon themselves. The loss of all the fingers, or of a foot or an arm, thanks to the treadmill, or given the opportunities of the naval dockyard where there must be axes and shovels to use, could not save the convicts from their flogging. They would cast themselves, also, under the wheels of the heavy waggons, drawn by an engine, that carried away the clay they had dug out from the dock basins. In 1872, there were seventeen cases of prisoners wilfully fracturing their legs and arms under the engine. 'There was no reason', in the words of the Governor of the prison, 'why they should not be flogged because they had only mutilated an arm or a leg.' One of their most genuine grievances was concerned with the mo-

## RONDE INFERNALE

notony and poorness of their diet. They would eat soap or candles to supplement this deficiency, until no more than one candle a week was issued and, if this disappeared, they were severely punished and must sit in darkness in their cells. A favourite device was to stir a cup of hot cocoa with a candle for the drops of hot grease that would appear.

But, once in the punishment cells, they attacked themselves with the ferocity of despair. There are instances of convicts tearing off all the nails of their hands and feet, or even scratching out their own eyes in impotent rage and fury. No power on earth could get them out of prison or shorten their sentence, and the thought of this drove them mad. If some of the worst features of the old penitentiaries had disappeared, others, less dramatic but as terrible in monotony, had taken their place. The heart and soul were broken in this purgatory, the continuance of which was for punishment and not for cure. The same dreadful old criminals lingered in the gaols who had begun, as youths, wearing the hood-beak. Even so late as the time when Wilde was lodged in Reading Gaol there will have been an old 'lag' or two, lying under the same roof as he, who had worn the hood-beak in the prisons of thirty years before and had trodden, masked and cowed, along the corridors. It is probable, indeed, that much of the terror attaching to our ideas of prison has its origin in those dreadful hoods or masks.

The Dantesque circle will still have been enacted, day after day, in Reading Gaol; but, for our final view of it, we return again to an earlier age. The seven, or twelve, or fifteen years of purgatory knew this drama, every day, wet or fine. We will take our places and see the column come, antlike, out of the tunnel. The first circle of the yard joins the head to the tail of it; and the dread circle, the infernal round begins. There is a little dwarf, hydrocephalous like the rest, who has to run, now and then, in order to keep up with them. In some curious way it is as if these cowed figures have been summoned out of the darkness and made to turn about and show their paces in case there

## RONDE INFERNALE

is some change in them. But nothing ever alters. With the long-term men you cannot even see the white hairs underneath the hood. Round and round goes the dwarf; and, next to him, is the cowed figure who, we are told, was solicitor in a country town before he came to this. There have been clergymen here and men who were rich, once, and no one could tell them from the inveterate gaolbirds.

All are degraded, as if by death, to the lowest and most abject humiliation. And yet, as has been said, they are no longer the ordinary coarse-featured criminals: they have nothing vulgar or brutal about them. Their cropped heads are hidden by the hood-beak. Round and round they go, with bowed shoulders, and will not lift their feet. Their shuffling steps carry them round the circle. Sometimes a warder calls a number and the cowed figure quickens its pace, but never straightens its shoulders. And, in silence, the monotony accomplishes its end. The whistle blows. The head of the circle, and then the whole body, is swallowed in the door. The last of the hydrocephalous heads has gone. The hood-beak goes.



## V PURGATORIO

### 2. Transportation. Mudie's Place, Port Arthur, Port Macquarie and Point Puer

**T**he next, and more awful, purgatory lay beyond the seas. Those who had been rejected by the world into which they were born were sent out to suffer on an empty and unhallowed shore. There is this same merciless mixing of the innocent with the guilty, of the sheep with the goats. Convicts possessed of an appalling record of crime were given the same treatment as, for instance, a youth of seventeen, of otherwise exemplary character, who was sentenced to transportation for life, in 1843, for stealing letters containing two pounds from the post office in which he was employed. A few years before this, children of nine or ten were given a lifetime of exile. It was the principle of the law to hurry offenders to their doom at the very first faltering of their steps. No quarter was given. There was never a second chance. The guilty and the nearly innocent were cast out together. Their treatment becomes a commentary upon life in which the miserable have something to be miserable for, or are put to their misery aimlessly and without pity. They were thrown together into the pit at the earliest sign of infection. The spewing forth of taint or corruption grew in extent until no fewer than four thousand convicts a year were sent into the southern or Austral seas. In the time of which we are speaking, between 1820 and 1850, there was a nucleus of thirty thousand felons in these settlements and more were arriving, yearly. A whole generation was even dead, by

## CROSSING THE SEA

then, for the first shipload had arrived as far back as 1787. In the course of all this time perhaps a hundred thousand convicts had been shipped across the seas. There is, thus, a formidable total to be considered. This shore of the dead, as in that picture by Brueghel, described long ago, swarms with figures.

Soon we shall be in their midst, but the process of their transportation across the Stygian seas was accompanied with every due circumstance of horror. Charon's boat cracked with the whip. Men, women and children were flogged without discrimination. The transport ships could be described, literally, as floating hells. We read of an early voyage on which thirty-eight men and eleven women were tied to the gangway and beaten with the cat. In another ship a little boy, ten years old, was given ten strokes of the cat every day for ten days, after which the number of strokes was doubled, and he died. Thinking of these dreadful ships, it may be said that from the moment the vessel turned its nose into the Channel the prisoners were in hell. The conditions under which they lived were indescribable. Their company consisted of the worst criminals and the brazen viragos of the slums, with an admixture of forgers and defaulting lawyers, pickpockets, and servant girls who had stolen or had killed their newborn babes. In the early ships there is no doubt that the women convicts were left to the disposition of the officers and sailors. The voyage round the Cape lasted for six months, at least, and the slightest murmur on the part of the convicts was translated into mutiny and dealt with as such. Their slow voyage towards Purgatory, through howling winds and burning seas, was a gathering crescendo of discomfort and ill-treatment. There must be added to this the sordid features and foul oaths of the slums. It is only necessary to picture an interior scene, at night, under the fitful oil lamp, with the fetid smell rising from row after row of bunks, each with its inhabitant whose expression, even in sleep, is the index to his ferocity or despair; or his face is turned to the wall and he snores in animal bestiality, or has escaped into a peaceful and untroubled



## BLACK SWANS

sleep. It would be, indeed, those silent sleepers with their faces turned to the wall who would arouse our pity. They have only had a taste of hell: and the others have been in it always.

But the dramatic interest of the voyage heightens, day after day, with their passage through the warming seas. Slowly, slowly, we may imagine, they came in sight of coral isles, and passed them by. The albatross kept them company, coming out of the polar distance, the sea eagle of Antarctica from the iron crags, who never rested and waved his wings above the ice. The grey frigate bird followed the ship for its carrion. As they neared the Australian shore, and coasted that continent, the summer seas shadowed, in one quarter, as if for rain. It was a nation of black swans darkening the water, riding at their ease off the Stygian shore. Their red beaks were a mark or disk of identity, upon the sable or funereal plumes. Their crepuscular, or antipodean darkness was unrelieved, except for this. And, now, the proud arching of their necks could be seen like the snow-white swans of home, but these were swans of Pluto, of the underworld. Their ember shadows floated on the Styx. The sable nation fished the dark waters shaded by their wings. They lifted on the waves: and braked themselves downwards, with a flash of the red oars of their feet. They had their liberty. And when the convict ship had passed, as the long ripple of its wake reached out to them and the shadow of the white sails fell upon them, one and all flashed their wings and rising into the air darkened the sky towards land. Not 'floating like snow, down by the banks of Po', but like black rags or clouts upon the Stygian waters they came down again, and the ship passed on into the sunset.

Next morning, before it was light, there was the groaning of the jenny. The anchor dropped, in many fathoms. It was the new world; and, in the twilight, looked like the bare bones of the old. They saw a town of wooden sheds and bright houses of red brick. There was no sand; and the eucalyptus trees were whitish-blue instead of green. For a few days, till all was ready,

## TERRA FIRMA

they could see no more. Then there sounded the tramping of feet, and in scarlet and pipeclay the soldiers came aboard. Carrying their bundles, the convicts crossed the gangway to terra firma and marched to their quarters through the brand new town. Their tribulation was timed to begin from the earliest possible moment. But the indentures had to be signed before distribution could begin. There was the road gang and the labour of the dockyard: worse still, there was the hired labour up in the interior settlements, the money being paid to government and the condition left entirely to the ill will of the employer.

In the towns, the convicts worked in chain gangs in the streets. The interior settlements did not begin until later. First of all, there were the new towns to be laid out and roads to be made. The convicts were treated with appalling brutality. No distinction was made between the offences committed, and incorrigible criminals, descendants, sons or grandsons, of the terrible beings painted by Hogarth in *Beer Street* and *Gin Lane*, worked side by side, chained to poor wretches who had known better days, or been caught early in the trap like the youth of seventeen whom we mentioned. Thirty years, and more, of misery stalked the brand new streets and sighed for the green trees of home. We read in the words of an old convict, spoken in 1831, of his landing in 1791, forty years before, and he says: 'One man came ashore in the *Pitt*; his name was Dixon: he was a gentleman. He was put to the drag, but it soon done for him. He began on a Thursday and died on a Saturday, as he was dragging a load down Constitution Hill.' One wonders what the history of this poor wretch can have been and what offence brought him here into this hell. It is certain, at least, that he was happier dead. The weaker convicts died like flies, crushed by the heavy work and hopelessness. Those who survived were turned by the severity of their punishment into raging brutes. We read elsewhere, in another contemporary account, of a typical and daily sight: 'He saw something which he took for a gigantic centipede, which moved forward through the bush to the

## MUDIE'S PLACE

clanking of chains and the cracking of the overseer's whip. This was a log borne by a convict gang, and it will have been in this manner that Dixon died, dragging down the convict to either side of him as he fell. That mention of the cracking of the whip is key to the worst horror of this hell which, in every instance, was no less than the flagellant's paradise. This, be it remembered, was a time when our race prided themselves with having long ago abolished torture, although with innate hypocrisy we allowed those appalling punishments to continue.

But the worst horrors of all are concerned with the interior settlements, where anyone of fiendish disposition could wreak his will unopposed upon the convicts indentured to him. One of the most brutal was a ruffian called Mudie, who had come out from England with an unpleasant reputation and enough money to start labour camps on a large scale in the interior. The worst horrors, such as this, are to be associated with Mudie, or his like: 'I saw a man walk across the yard with the blood that had run from his lacerated flesh squashing out of his shoes at every step he took. A dog was licking the blood off the triangles, and the ants were carrying away great pieces of human flesh that the lash had scattered about the ground. The scourger's feet had worn a deep hole in the ground by the violence with which he whirled himself round on it so as to strike the quivering and wealed back, out of which stuck the sinews, white, ragged and swollen. The infliction was one hundred lashes, at about half-minute intervals, so as to extend the punishment through nearly an hour. They had a pair of scourgers, who gave each other spell and spell about, and they were bespattered with blood like a couple of butchers.'<sup>1</sup>

We read in Sir Richard Therry's *Thirty Years' Residence in New South Wales*: 'As I passed along the road, about eleven in the morning, there issued out of the prisoners' barracks, a party of four men who bore on their shoulders (two supporting the head and two the feet) a miserable convict writhing in an

<sup>1</sup>Charles White, *Convict Life in Australia*, p. 499, Hobart, 1889.

## MARSYAS AND THE SATYRS

agony of pain—his voice piercing the air with terrific screams. I was informed that it was only a prisoner, who had been flogged, on his way to the hospital.'

There is another description, by the ex-convict Holt, of an appalling scene of torture. 'We marched to Toongabbe, where all the government transports were kept, who were called out to witness the punishment of the prisoners. One man, Maurice Fitzgerald, was sentenced to three hundred lashes, and the method of punishment was such as to make it most effectual. The unfortunate man had his arms extended round a tree, his two wrists tied with cords, and his breast pressed closely to the tree, so that flinching from the blow was out of the question, for it was impossible for him to stir. Two men were appointed to flog, namely Richard Rice, a left-handed man, and John Johnston, from Sydney, who was right-handed. They stood on each side of Fitzgerald; and I never saw two threshers in a barn move their flails with more regularity than did these two man-killers, unmoved by pity, and rather enjoying their employment than otherwise. The very first blows made the blood spirt from Fitzgerald's shoulders. I have witnessed many horrible scenes, but this was the most appalling sight that I have ever seen. The day was windy, and I protest that, though I was at least fifteen yards to leeward from the sufferer, the blood, skin and flesh blew in my face as the executioners shook it from their cats. Fitzgerald received his whole three hundred lashes, during which Doctor Mason used to go up to him occasionally to feel his pulse, it being contrary to the law to flog a man beyond fifty lashes without having a doctor present. I never shall forget this humane doctor as he smiled and said: "Go on: this man will tire you both before he fails." During the time Fitzgerald was receiving the punishment he never uttered a groan; the only words he said were: "Flog me fair. Do not strike me on the neck!" When it was over two constables took him by the arms to help him into the cart. He said to them: "Let my arms go!" and struck each of them in the pit of the stomach with his el-

## THE SENSATION

bows, and knocked them both down. He then stepped into the cart unassisted, as if he had not received a blow. The Doctor remarked: "That man has strength enough to bear two hundred more!"

"The next prisoner who was tied up was another Irishman, Paddy Galvin, a young lad about twenty years of age. He was, also, sentenced to three hundred lashes. The first hundred were given on his shoulders, and he was cut to the bone between the shoulderblades, which were bare to the bone. The Doctor then directed the next hundred to be inflicted lower down, which reduced his flesh to such a jelly that the Doctor ordered him to have the remaining hundred on the calves of his legs. During the whole time Galvin never even whimpered or flinched, if, indeed, it had been possible for him to have done so. He was asked: "Where were the pikes hid?" Galvin answered that he did not know, and that, if he did, he would not tell. "You may hang me," said he, "if you like; but you shall have no music out of my mouth to make others dance upon nothing." He was then put into the cart and sent into the hospital!" Both men, so Holt informs us, were from County Cork. I, for my part, find it impossible to believe that their heroism was not for some higher cause, or in expiation for some other existence.

Here is a graphic account, in the victim's own words, of a similar flogging with the cat. It took place, in actual fact, in England, but this can have made no difference to the feelings experienced, and since the poor wretches who endured these torments never had the power or the chance to express themselves we give this firsthand account in the words of one who suffered. The author was a private in a cavalry regiment who was accused of insubordination. He was warned for punishment and taken into the riding-school where his sentence was read to him in front of the assembled regiment. He continues: "The warning trumpet sounded. I felt an astounding sensation between the shoulders, under my neck, which went to my toenails in one direction, to my fingernails in another, and stung

## THE SENSATION

me to the heart as if a knife had gone through my body. The sergeant major called in a loud voice "One". I felt as if it would be kind of Simpson not to strike me on the same place again. He came on the second time a few inches lower, and then I thought the former strokes were sweet and agreeable compared with that one. The sergeant major counted "Two". The cat was swung twice round the farrier's head again, and he came on somewhere about the right shoulderblade, and the loud voice of the reckoner said "Three". The shoulderblade was as sensitive as any other part of the body, and when he came again on the left shoulder and the voice cried "Four", I felt my flesh quiver in every nerve, from the scalp of my head to my toenails. The time between each stroke seemed so long as to be agonizing, and yet the next came too soon. It was lower down, and felt to be the severest. The word "Five" made me betake myself to mental arithmetic: this, thought I, is only the fortieth part of what I am to receive. Six followed, so on, up to twenty-five. The sergeant major then said: "Halt". •

'Simpson stood back and a young trumpeter, who had not flogged before, took his cat and began. He had practised often at a stable post, or a sack of sawdust, and could handle the instrument as scientifically as anyone. He gave me some dreadful cuts about the ribs, first on one side, and then the other. Someone bade him hit higher up. He then gave them upon the blistered and swollen place, where Simpson had been practising. The pain in my lungs was now more severe, I thought, than on my back. I felt as if I would burst in the internal parts of my body. I could have cried out. I detected myself giving something like a groan, and to prevent its utterance again I put my tongue between my teeth, held it there, and bit it almost in two pieces. What with the blood from my tongue, and my lips which I had also bitten, and the blood from my lungs, or some other internal part ruptured by the writhing agony, I was almost choked and became black in the face. It now became Simpson's turn to give twenty-five. Only fifty had been inflicted, and the time

## THE SKETA

since they began was like a long period of life: I felt as if I had lived all the time of my real life in pain and torture, and that the time when existence had pleasure in it was a dream long, long gone. Simpson got up among the old sores: the strokes were not so sharp as at first: they were like blows of heavy weights, but more painful than the fresh ones. He travelled downwards and came on heavier than before, but, as I thought, slower, for the sergeant major only to be counting the fifteenth and sixteenth of the third twenty-five. When the other youngster had reached, or nearly reached, his second twenty, I felt as if I could yield and beg forgiveness.' But, at the end of the fourth twenty-five, he was taken down from the triangle and it was announced by the officer in charge that the rest of his sentence was remitted. He was led to hospital. 'There, a cloth dipped in a lotion of some kind was put over my skin and I was laid down on my back. It soon became so stiff that to rise seemed as impossible as to rise with the weight of a ton attached to me. I felt as if dragged down by tons of heaviness.' He was some three weeks in hospital, and then recovered.<sup>1</sup>

This appalling punishment, be it noted, was only one third as severe as that meted out to the two Irishmen who were mentioned a few moments ago. But, in the interior settlements, such floggings were a daily occurrence. Another fiendish device was the infliction of twenty-five lashes daily until the desired confession was extorted, it being generally some trivial matter such as the stealing of some food or a piece of clothing. These settlements, of which we take Mudie's place as being typical, are little separate hells, complete in their own orbit and corresponding, where the dreadful austerities of this system are concerned, to the Sketae or coenobitic forms of Mount Athos, familiar to all who have read about that island of monks, while the big prisons of the towns are the idiorrhhythmic system, the great assemblies living together in community in large monasteries.

There is this parallel between the ideal austerities of monk

<sup>1</sup>A. Somerville, *Autobiography of a Working Man*, 1846.

## THE SKETA

and convict, but, if we return to the Sketa' or monastic grange of the fearful Mudie, it is to find every circumstance of horror and brutality so exaggerated in scale that its details are scarcely to be credited. Mudie, as employer of convict labour, had even the effrontery to publish a book in which he advocated the retention of the convicts after their sentences had expired since no punishment could be excessive for their faults. He was, therefore, a fit instrument to carry out the ideals of Mr. Stanley, the Home Secretary, who stated in Parliament that the object of transportation was to make the punishment worse than death. He was surrounded in the country by rivals no inferior to himself in cruelty for we find that, in 1831, the landowners presented a petition in which they urged that more severe floggings should be administered and that a heavier cat o' nine tails should be employed. The answer to this petition took the form of an investigation in which the resident magistrates noticed the effects of floggings that they had witnessed, and we give the following details from their report: John Green, absconding, fifty lashes. Appeared to suffer much, bled freely and fainted after punishment. Calvin Sampson, stealing, fifty lashes. Blood flowed at the fourth. The convict cried out at the eighteenth, and continued crying for the succeeding lashes. His skin was terribly torn, and blood flowed during the whole of the punishment. This man groaned much and prayed, while suffering punishment; and afterwards declared that he would never come again. I am of opinion that he was sufficiently punished at the twenty-fifth lash. Edward Scandrake—boy—feigning sickness, twenty-five lashes. He received fifty lashes last Monday week, but was never flogged before. His breech was sore from the last punishment: blood came at the first stroke: he screamed dreadfully at every lash, blood streaming from the old wounds; complained bitterly of the treatment at Carter's Barracks—Mudie's place—and wished someone would examine into it. D. Macdonald, fifty lashes; much lacerated, bled after twentieth stroke. J. Denison twenty-five lashes, bled much. John Orr, a boy,



## THE MONSTER PEARCE

twelve lashes; cried out much. J. Green, fifty lashes, fainted after. T. Holdsworth, blood at fifth lash. J. Kenneth, blood at eighteenth lash. E. Davis, continued crying after flogging was over.

The culmination of this horror was a mutiny, or at least an attempted escape, on the part of five young convicts, all between twenty and thirty years of age. As they had attempted violence they were put on trial under a local ordinance, called the Bushrangers' Act, which rendered them liable to execution within twenty-four hours. But their evidence of the brutalities they had undergone created a violent impression in court and moved many of the onlookers to tears. Hitchcock, their spokesman, asked leave for them to bare their backs in order that the court should see the fearful scars and lacerations with which they were disfigured. This could not be allowed; but the recital of their wrongs caused a strong revulsion of feeling against Mudie and his like. And yet these conditions were allowed to continue for another twenty years in their circumstantial horror.

Such incarnate fiends as this Mudie and his associates were the creators of a ferocious race who, in their misdeeds, excelled every known record of the kind. The liberty of the convict was to escape into the bush where, inevitably, he starved. Men who had come out to Australia, in the beginning, for stealing a few rabbits, or robbing a till as an errand boy, became so brutalized by these perpetual floggings that the human instincts were extinguished in them. There is the case, for instance, of the convict Pearce. This monster had escaped once, years before. He was strongly suspected of cannibalism and, upon the proof of it, when ordered to execution, made this confession in his own words. It was on the night, be it remembered, before he was to die. He had escaped with two more convicts. One of them, he and his companion killed and ate. There was Greenhill left, who had the axe with which that deed was done; and this, in the words of Pearce, was the situation which developed between them. 'I watched Greenhill for two nights, for I thought he

## THE MONSTER PEARCE

eyed me much more than usual. He always kept the axe under his head when lying down, and carried it on his back in the daytime. One night we came to a little creek between two hills, where we kindled a fire. I thought he had a bad disposition to me this night. Near the break of day I found he was asleep. I ran up, took the axe from under his head, and struck him with it and killed him. I then took part of his thigh and his arm, and went for several days after this till all was completely done. I went on for two days without anything to eat; I then took a piece of a leather belt and was going to hang myself, but I took another notion not to do it. I went on a little farther and saw a fire, and at this fire were pieces of kangaroos and opossum. I picked these up and ate what I could and carried the remainder with me. I, then, went on for several days until I came to a little marsh, where I saw a duck and ten young ones. I made a leap into the water; the old one flew and the young ones dived; I stood in the water up to my middle, and up starts two of the young ones at my feet. I made a grasp at them and caught them both. After this I put up at a little freshwater creek, about two hours before dark. The next day after this I got to the top of a hill, and looking all round me I saw a large mountain, which I took to be the Table, but I could not be convinced as to the certainty of it, so I went on a little farther. I then came to a big river at the high plains, and travelled along it for two days. I came to a flock of sheep, which belonged to Tom Triffet, at the Falls. I drove them all forward to a scrub and made a hold at a large one, but it carried me off and I was forced to let it go, so after that I drove them up again and caught a lamb and ate it raw. . . . The hut keeper came forward and said he would shoot me if I would not stop immediately. He then put some questions to me, and then he knew me. He carried the remains of the lamb, and took me with him to the hut, and made meat ready for me, where I stopped three days and he gave me all attention. Then, he said his master was coming up, and I could not stay there any longer.'

## THE MONSTER PEARCE

This cynical ruffian—and he could afford to be cynical—made no pretence of concealing his crimes. He was afraid of nothing and owned to his partiality for human flesh. Parts of a human body, half devoured, had been found on his person when he was caught this second time. And yet, in all this horror of the convict land, the narrative of this brute, told in his own words, has the directness of a work of art and is, indeed, the only thing in all early Australian history that has a hint of such human realities. Those who have read *St. Julien l'Hospitalier* of Flaubert will recognize an affinity between the rabid convict and the young knight hunting in the forest and shunned by the animals. And, as told by Pearce, it is a landscape like those in the drawings of William Blake. Pearce is in the high plains, the primitive and empty plains of the Book of Job; and, after seeing the keeper's hut, might come to a golden cornfield with a church spire, like a stone pyramid or a witch's cap, climbing up out of the corn. That would be at sunset, when even the fleeces of the sheep are heavy with gold, and then this vision would die back into the thirsty wilderness.<sup>1</sup>

But even Pearce was not quite alone in his kind. He had his rivals. There was the convict Lynch, from whose confession on his penultimate night in 1842 we make this quotation. Lynch had, among other crimes, murdered an entire family and burnt their bodies. These are his words, in description of the funeral pyre: 'They flared up as if they were so many bags filled with fat. It was an awful thing to stand alone in the dead of night and see the four bodies burning to ashes. By the morning there was nothing left but a heap, like of slacked lime; I took it up in my hands and buried it in another part of the paddock.' Lynch has this same gift, as had Pearce, of expressing himself in dramatically terse and simple language. The birthright of our language asserts itself out of their bloodstained lips in this purgatory of torture and suffering.

<sup>1</sup>This extraordinary affair took place, not in Australia, but in Van Diemen's Land. Pearce was living at Hobart Town, in 1823.

## RED RAIN

The interior of the continent, which had not yet been traversed by human foot, was a waterless waste, a red hot furnace of rock and sand. Its analogy was to the red hot centre of the earth, beneath our feet. It had no history; and was in the dawn of its own dreadful day when we sent the felons of our slums to people its emptiness. The gates of hell were open wide and were not closed for sixty years. Two or three generations of men suffered its penalties. The vast extent of this purgatory, its untraversed centre, and the long stretches of its untrodden shores, these thoughts lend an additional horror to their dejection and despair. It was a true purgatory in the gradation of its terms of seven, or fourteen years, or transportation for life. And so vast is its area that all traces have long ago been obliterated of that past. The air is sweet again. But there is reason if the sky, on occasion, rains red rain and drops of blood beat against the window pane and leave their stain upon the soil.

If the attempt to sully a whole continent had to fail there was a smaller and more apt paradise to turn into purgatory. This was Tasmania or Van Diemen's Land. This island must be possessed of as much natural beauty as any country in the world. The interior rises into beautiful hills: there are lovely woods and streams and the flowers that are indigenous to the island weave the earth into a bright carpet or trail, flamelike, among the green trees. For Tasmania is a green and verdant paradise. Its blossoming orchards are a sweet-breath cloud caught low in the valleys and, later, the red-cheeked apples load down the branches.

It had no history, which makes a safer past for any earthly paradise. There were only the Blue-men or aborigines, with authentic bluish tinge upon their skins, and sunk in harmless savagery, not warlike, as the black men of the continent, or inveterate warriors like the Maoris. But the extermination of these harmless relics of the Stone Age was decided upon and they were driven from all corners of the island, being, in any case, very few in number, into Flinder's Island. Within a few

## THE STYX

years there were only an old woman left and her two half-caste daughters. The Blue-men had gone, and gone for ever.

Meanwhile, the settlement of the island proceeded, but it was not long before the first batch of convicts arrived, and from the year 1840 more convicts were sent to Tasmania than to Australia. The prisons were Port Arthur and Port Macquarie. The first of these must have exceeded in dread awfulness anything that has been heretofore mentioned; but, beyond it and in the outer seas is Norfolk Island, at which we have not yet arrived.

Port Arthur, then, which is on an inlet on the western coast and not far from Hobart, the capital of the island, had every concomitant for the living dead. It had its narrow waters, the channel or Styx leading to its shore, and even, in extraordinary symbolism of death, its Cerberus, as we shall see. Cerberus, we may remind ourselves, was the dog of Pluto. He had a hundred heads. He was stationed at the entrance to hell, as a watchful keeper, to prevent the living from entering the infernal regions and the dead from escaping from their confinement. Those heroes who, in their lifetime, visited Pluto's kingdom used to appease the barking mouths of Cerberus with bread. Orpheus lulled him to sleep with his lyre: and Hercules dragged him from hell when he went to redeem Alcestis. So much for Cerberus. But, in Port Arthur, we find the exact repetition or parallel to this dread mythology.

From Port Arthur the only means of escape was across a narrow neck of land called Eagle Hawk's neck, four hundred and fifty yards across, guarded by soldiers, and by dogs chained to lampposts, and always fed with raw meat to keep them savage. There were a chain of huts each containing a constable and his dog. Each dog was chained to a post, with a barrel for kennel, and a lamp to illuminate his night watch. There were fourteen dogs on the chain. One of them, we are told, amused himself sometimes, and kept his teeth and temper in practice, by running into the shallows and fighting with the sharks; and he not infrequently succeeded in dragging them ashore. For the

## CERBERUS

sea was picketed with sharks. And, also, dogs were kept chained upon wooden stages set out some distance in the water; all of which work, in irony, had been constructed by the convicts themselves, working under the lash and forced to labour upon the surety of their own imprisonment.

This fearful place was inhabited from 1830 till 1877. The regime was more brutal, at first, than it is possible to conceive of. Flogging went on incessantly. At the beginning of the prison, owing to its inaccessibility, there was shortage of food, and the stealing of a loaf of bread brought a death sentence. There were frequent mutinies; always punished with the execution of a dozen, or so, of the ringleaders. The convicts wore a dress of yellow, or yellow and black, with strong leather caps, with Felon marked on the back and front. In culminating triumph of repression the hood-beak was introduced and worn in the menagerie-like chapel of the prison, which has now, most appropriately, been burnt to the ground. There are only the tombstones, without inscription, of those who died or were hung. Some awful entries appear in the prison ledger.

Towards the end of its history this prison must have presented the most peculiar aspect, for no fresh convicts had been sent out from England for fifteen or twenty years and many of the felons were old, old men. It must have been like that dream of ordinary experience in which one is forty, or fifty, or sixty years old and still at school. The unpleasant faces aging slowly, are still around one; and it has become an unhappy permanence. The prisoners were survivals of another age, like monks or eunuchs supported into their senility.

Port Arthur was visited by Marcus Clarke in 1870. This is his description: 'I know that the prisoners seemed all alike in feature, and that I could no more distinguish the one from the other than I could swear to a Chinaman or a two-toothed wether. I know that a general scowl of depression seemed to be in the fellows' faces, and that the noise of the irons made my unaccustomed ears tingle. There seemed to hang over the whole

## CERBERUS

place a horrible gloom, as though the sunlight had been withdrawn from it. The criminal lunatics were of but two descriptions; they cowered and crawled like whipped foxhounds to the feet of their keepers, or they raged howling blasphemies and hideous imprecations upon their gaolers. The worst man whom the authorities claimed to have on their books was a certain Mooney, who had been transported about the age of thirteen for stealing a hare. He had become, in time, a raging, desperate convict; he had been flogged, he had been in a mutiny, he had been a bushranger. "And where is he now?" the visitor asked. "Oh, he's alright, now," was the answer. "We've got him all right now. He's a lunatic in Port Arthur." I was eager, continues Marcus Clarke, 'to see this poacher of thirteen years. The warder drew aside a peephole in the barred door, and I saw a grizzled, gaunt, and half-naked old man coiled up in a corner. The peculiar wild-beast smell which belongs to some forms of furious madness exhaled from his cell. The gibbering animal within turned and his eyes met mine. "Take care," said the gaoler, "he has a habit of sticking his fingers through the peephole to try and poke someone's eye out." I drew back and a nail-bitten hairy finger like the toe of an ape was thrust with rapid and simian neatness through the aperture. "This is how he amuses himself," said the warder, forcing to the iron slot; "he had best be dead, I'm thinking."'

In the last years there was some slackening of the rules; but it is necessary to think of Port Arthur in the 'thirties, 'forties and 'fifties of the century.

Then, it was a hive of Cockney, and of the dialects of the provincial slums and the sunken bucolic distance. There were men there who knew every street corner of London. The contamination of the slums spread from mouth to mouth of their company. They were locked up at night, it must be realized, in immense dormitories and left in darkness from six o'clock, in the winter, until daylight. The full implications of that fetid darkness can be left until we reach Norfolk Island, but the rumours

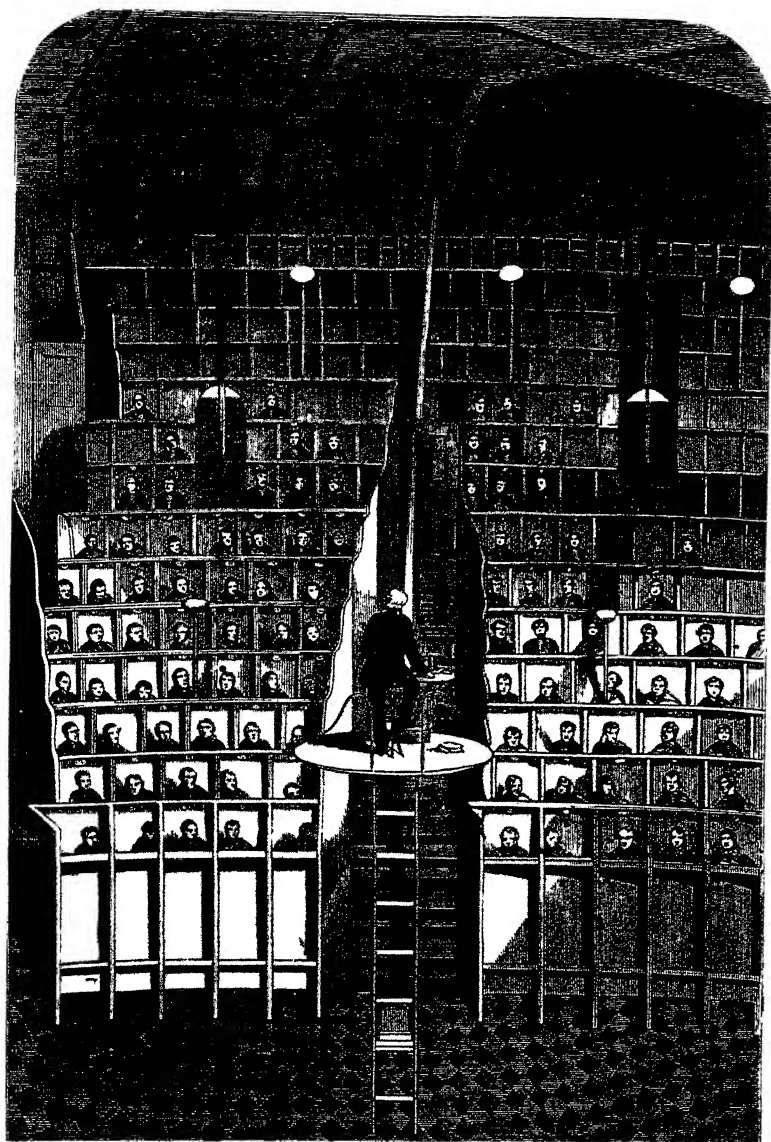
## THE CONSTABLES

of it should begin, now, to assail our ears. We can think of Port Arthur on a night of full moon when the Cerberus-dogs would be barking, without reason, all night through. The very term 'constable' in this connexion, and thinking of them in their huts by the lighted lamps, or on the platforms in the water, assumes a special and formidable significance, for they are guardians of the Styx and accustomed to the boat of Charon slipping out of the shadows. The dog Cerberus is chained outside their hut and bays at the full moon into the empty seas and the still emptier wilderness behind the shore, where there is nothing for the escaped dead except to starve, or surrender to be hanged. In the low huts the convicts rattle in their chains as they turn from side to side; and the menagerie chapel with its rows of cages, or of lidless coffins, haunted by the hood-beak, shows white as chalk in the moonlight.

But there is, also, Port Macquarie: for Port Arthur is not all. This latter prison, which was not inhabited for so long, lies on a deep inlet on the western coast of Tasmania, about two hundred miles from Hobart Town. In some respects there was not much difference between the prisons. Port Arthur had its chained dogs; but, in other respects, Port Macquarie was as bad. The convicts were lodged on Sarah Island, in barracks flanked by a two-storey prison, whose cells were the terror of the most hardened. Each morning they received their breakfast of porridge, water and salt, and then rowed, under the protection of their guard, to the woodcutting stations, where they worked without food until night. The launching and hewing of the timber compelled them to work up to their waists in water. Many of them, even so, were heavily ironed.

The chief part of the convict population resided upon the same island as the soldiers and officers, but about half a mile off there was a small rock, which rock was used as a place of punishment for the refractory convicts to be sent to at night, in order that they might be separated as much as possible from the others. Men who misconducted themselves were sent to sleep





ADULT SCHOOL IN THE CHAPEL, ON THE  
SEPARATE SYSTEM, AT THE SURREY HOUSE  
OF CORRECTION, WANDSWORTH

*(Mayhew and Binny, 1864)*



## ON THE WET ROCKS

upon the island, and it seldom happened that they could land upon the rock without getting wet, probably up to the waist or neck, and the result was that they must either sleep in their wet clothes or sleep naked. The greater part of them slept in their clothes, and particularly those who had chains on, and nine tenths of the poor wretches were in heavy irons. Fires were not allowed on the rock after eight p.m. There was one famous prisoner who was kept chained, on a still smaller rock, in a scooped-out hole, with an iron grating over him, chained by a chain twenty-six feet long, his legs being also in trumpet-irons, so called, because the long links were like those of a trombone. After an appalling history of torment this modern Prometheus became mad, but his madness did not release him. The prisoners worked in irons which were usually of about seven pounds weight, and they were occasionally made fast to a log of wood by a chain about three feet long attached to their leg irons. They were, in fact, obliged to drag this log about with them wherever they went. Some of them were chained to a wall. They had to sleep in these irons; and those who died were buried in them. Another punishment at Port Macquarie was to be compelled to sleep on the wet rocks in damp clothes and fetters. On the average of five years, 1822-1826, there were 245 prisoners, of whom 167 were annually punished by flogging. The total of lashes given was 33,723; an annual average of 6,744. The cat employed was the 'thieves', or double cat, a much heavier weapon than usual. In fact, in point of horror, there is not much to choose between Port Arthur and Port Macquarie. Moreover, it was Port Macquarie which had that extraordinary annexe on a little islet or point of land opposite, named appropriately, Point Puer. This was the prison for the juvenile offenders who had been sent out from England. Their ages ranged between eight and eighteen years old. Point Puer was a worse and more awful Dotheboys Hall, without even the excuse that it was run for Mr. Squeers' profit. This was a penal settlement.

The history of this place, it is merciful to think, belongs to a

## THE JUVENILE ACADEMY

remote antiquity, for it seems only to have been inhabited from 1821 till 1833; and at this distance of time details or personal anecdotes are difficult to discover. That was a time when the private schools of the upper classes in England were worse and more brutal than any reformatory, so that when we are dealing with a penal settlement for children who were thought bad enough to be transported all this distance from home it is necessary to anticipate the worst. And the short life of Point Puer is in sign of the failure of this attempt. The children were incorrigible; and too many of them died.

The dwarfish and nightmare inmates were dressed in suits of coarse canvas. Their stunted features and close-cropped hair must have added to the unredeemed ugliness of the thick stone walls. There are still to be seen the ruins of the underground dungeons in which the most hopeless of the children were confined. Beatings and bread and water were incessantly applied. A smaller form of the terrible cat was in use, as if to prepare them for Norfolk Island where, inevitably, many of the children would end their days; but more often the punishment was applied with lighter and more appropriate instruments, chiefly the birch rod, which was nearly as painful and had not the merit of rendering the victim unconscious. The brutal effect of these daily birchings might have been what Point Puer was intended for, for this was the sum of the instruction. Because no bones were broken it did not matter. Perhaps there have been few places in the world more horrible than Point Puer. The clipped and slangy speech of these slum children, spoken so many thousands of miles away out of the fog, ended its orbit in this peninsula of pine trees. They had been sent to the other side of the world to suffer, in the remote antipodes. There was, also, about Point Puer, this sub-hell, or under-purgatory, that was implicit in the bullying of the children by each other. They had to be left alone, at night, in their dormitories; and the example of their guardians will not have made them remiss in the application of these same methods to themselves. It was a universal

## THE JUVENILE ACADEMY

principle in prison life that all floggings should be given in public, in front of the other prisoners, for the sake of intimidation. When left to themselves, therefore, the boys will have beaten and tortured the weaker or more imbecile children to their hearts' content. And any discovery of their misdeeds could only end in an intensified orgy of beating from the warders. It was, in fact, a doubled purgatory at Point Puer, a hell which renewed itself and took new forms at every turn.

They are to be seen eating their meals, tearing ravenously at the noisome food. And, ever, there was this undercurrent of conspiracy; they were plotting something together and must be watched. They were stealing another boy's food and shuffling and kicking under the tables. Talking was forbidden, yet there was a running fire of talk under cover of a frantic rattling of spoons and forks. Thieves' tricks were in the very nature of these children. They could talk without opening their lips and communicate by signs. They were being taught, not to improve, but to deepen their subterfuge and become adepts of deceit. And the venal hypocrisy of this system, the mutual guilt of prison warder and child convict, came to its culmination during daily prayers and on Sundays in the prison chapel. The orgy of punishment was given its rest on the Sabbath; but on the Monday there would be a beating for nearly every one of these little, kneeling felons. Nor is it to be supposed that they had any other ambition than to repay this suffering in its own kind, for any child criminal graduating from this school of crime to Port Arthur or Norfolk Island could only earn his repose, as a veteran of prison, by becoming the official scourger of his fellow prisoners. The transpontine parallel to the Rev. Daniel Nihil will have preached his sermon and another salutary week was over and done with. It was, in fact, to return to that privileged position which was the ambition of every convict, by the encouragement of this self-devouring, or cannibal taint among the prisoners, that the amenities of prison life were given their meed of hardship and suffering. It was the prisoners at

## THE JUVENILE ACADEMY

Port Arthur, who had to construct those elaborate defences by which they were guarded and, in every prison, it was a prisoner who was the official scourger of his fellows. Point Puer, then, was the academy in which these propensities were raised and fostered.

To our glimpse of them in the refectory and in the chapel must now be added the picture, in chiaroscuro, of their darkness. These children, whom it needed a Cruikshank to draw, will have been pitiless to their fellow sufferers. The dormitory must have been like a barred cage full of wildcats. If a gaoler came in with a lantern, in a trice they were all in bed and asleep; all of them, that is to say, except the victim of their cruelty, who would then be seized upon as ringleader of the uproar and made to suffer for it next day. And, if the night was horrid, the long summer mornings were no better when there were hours of light before the whistle called them from their beds. If such a thing as a sensitive child were to be found among them this would be the worst time of his suffering, when a whole daytime of cruelty and ugliness had gone by before even the beginning of another day of official punishment. We may delude ourselves that many broken hearts lie beneath the nameless tombstones of the place; some, failing, untended in illness, and others consumed and altogether destroyed in this double purgatory of prison. An epidemic, and there were many, was their release from hell.

A hundred years of neglect have allowed the green leaves to grow upon the ruins of Point Puer. There is none living, now, to tell us of its miseries. What became of those to whom the gates were opened we cannot know. Most of them, we have suggested, met Cerberus across the narrow waters. They passed their lives in prison, as they spent their childhood in Point Puer, and came in the end to that appalling place which we must now describe.

## V PURGATORIO

### 3. Norfolk Island

Norfolk Island lies far away in the empty ocean. It is as remote as St. Helena, or Easter Island, or Tristan da Cunha. A thousand miles separate it from the nearest point of land in Australia, and it is some three hundred miles distant from the most northerly cape of New Zealand. It is very small, containing an area of only thirteen and a half square miles; or it is more easy to visualize as being seven miles long and four miles across; about the size, that is to say, of a particularly large private park.

And it is, indeed, to a tropical park that its scenery is to be compared. The hills and valleys are covered with fine grass, and scattered here and there with groves or single trees of the Norfolk Island pine, dispersed, says one traveller, as if by the hands of the landscape gardener in the most picturesque manner over the whole island, up to the top of Mount Pitt, which rises to the height of more than a thousand feet. It resembles one grand park. There is an avenue of the Norfolk Island pines upwards of a mile and a half in length. Some of these pines are most noble trees, attaining more than two hundred feet in height. Sheep and cattle are seen in all directions revelling in the abundant pastures; and wild turkeys, fowls and pigs find luxurious abodes under the shelter of the thick groves of guava, lemon and loquat trees, from which large flocks of pigeons are disturbed, descendants of the imported dovecote breed. This was Norfolk Island, lost in the ocean; the only other land in sight being Philip Island, upon which every blade of grass had

## FIRST ARRIVALS

been nibbled away by the multitude of rabbits, so that it appeared like a high mound of red clay with a few solitary pine trees growing upon it, like the lunar or dead satellite of its parent isle.<sup>1</sup>

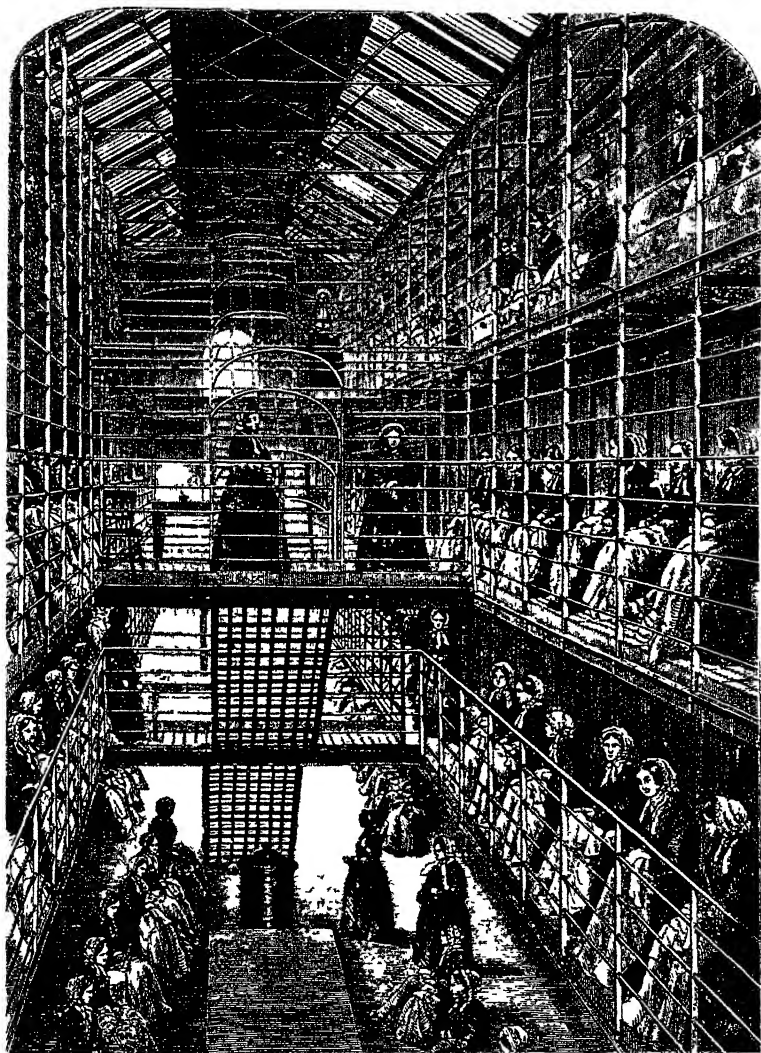
Up till 1788 Norfolk Island was entirely uninhabited, when a small colony of settlers was sent there from New South Wales. Two years later, two hundred convicts arrived. They remained on the island until 1807 when, by direction of the Home Government the convicts were removed and the establishment broken up. Not many details are known of this first, or premature settlement, but the labour was that of colonization. Norfolk Island was not yet the penitentiary that it was to become. The ruins of that premature prison were allowed to become overgrown with vegetation, and the island was once more deserted in the ocean.

In 1826 the first black hulk appeared again upon the horizon. A first batch of fifty convicts were landed and as many soldiers; and, from that year, the population of felons poured steadily into Norfolk Island. It was to be the penal settlement for all the Australian prisons. Only those who had been reconvicted in the colony, or who had come from England under life, or very long sentences, were condemned to Norfolk Island. But, by the time a certain Governor of the island, Captain Maconochie arrived, in March 1840, there were 1400 doubly ironed convicts in the colony. The convicts were disposed in three different stations upon the island, at the Settlement, the Cascades and Longridge, all of which places were some three miles distant from each other. The actual township of the island contained a three-storey prison, consisting of thirty wards, the biggest of which had accommodation for a hundred convicts, and the smallest for fifteen. There were, in addition, thirty-three cells for solitary confinement.

Every measure of penitence and repression upon the island

<sup>1</sup>This islet was once the abode of a now extinct bird, the *Nestor productus*, or Philip Island parrot, which was found nowhere else in the world.





FEMALE CONVICTS AT WORK, DURING THE  
SILENT HOUR, IN BRIXTON PRISON

*(Mayhew and Bimby, 1864)*



## FOURTEEN HUNDRED CONVICTS

was on a heavier scale than upon the mainland. The ex-convict Martin Cash was placed in chains the basils of which were as thick as a man's arm, and the links of which were thicker than the safety chains of a railway train. Elsewhere, there is mention of irons that weighed 14, 36 or even 47 pounds: a total of more than four times the weight of those in use in other penal settlements. Moreover, chained prisoners were suspended by one hand; gags, bridles or headstalls were used; and there was an instrument of torture in constant use called the Stretcher, an iron frame, six feet by three, the sides being kept in position by round iron bars twelve inches apart, like the bars of an immense gridiron. The torture consisted in fastening the prisoner upon this frame for twelve hours or more in a dark cell, his head hanging over the edge, without support.

Here are some entries from the official journal kept upon the island. '1844. John McGiowell was apprehended asleep in the bush. He had escaped from custody on 16 February. A sentence of two years in the chain gang was imposed. Four days later, John McGiowell was sentenced to receive 150 lashes and to work in 100 pounds irons for three months, in addition to being chained to the others.' In September, this convict was found dead on his mat by Wårder McChuskey, who, in awakening the chain gang, found that he had expired during the night. Later on, we read 'The convict Richard Henry received 200 lashes for insubordination, and for endeavouring to trump up a charge of unfairness in dealing with prisoners on the part of Wårder McChuskey.' Earlier, on 5 November, 1842, 'James Macdonald sentenced to receive 100 lashes and to work for three months in irons; and James Elliott to seventy-five lashes and three months in irons, for having been seen to associate with each other by signals, when silence was enjoined in the gang.' Another entry says: 'Thomas Downie was ordered to the dark cells for seven days, and to receive 200 lashes for insubordination and refusing to work. The task imposed upon him was to carry ashore lime in bags from the barque

## THE THROW OF THE DICE

*Frolic.* Prisoner refused duty under the excuse that the lime irritated his back, which was still open from a recent flogging.' It was, as a matter of fact, a favourite punishment with the authorities to sentence a convict to work with his wounds unhealed from a flogging, in the Cayenne pepper mill, the fine stinging dust from which was sufficient to madden a man with pain.

The full horror of this hell continued during some twenty-five years. And it was as bad, in the end, as at the beginning. One of the worst of the despots was Major Anderson. It was during his rule that Archbishop Ullathorne visited the island, but that was in 1834, comparatively early in the history of the settlement. Already, there had been sanguinary revolts against authority; and, not only this, but the convicts made ferocious attacks upon each other, not in private revenge, but merely from absolute weariness of their lives. Their hope was for execution and, failing this, for the respite of the journey to Sydney where they would be put upon trial. They would draw lots in order to decide who was to be the slayer and who the slain, and would involve the largest possible number of witnesses in the deed so that they, too, would be given the journey to trial and a respite from the hated island. Sir Richard Therry, who was then Attorney General of New South Wales, describes the appearance of one band of convicts who arrived for trial from Norfolk Island. 'Their sunken, glazed eyes, deadly pale faces, hollow fleshless cheeks, and once manly limbs shrivelled and withered up as if by premature old age, created a thrill of horror amongst the bystanders. They were all under thirty-five years of age, and there was not a man among them who had not undergone the punishment of a thousand lashes and upwards.' Soon after this, in 1834, the trials at Sydney were discontinued and the New South Wales Governor was empowered to convene a Criminal Court upon Norfolk Island, to be composed of a barrister and five officers.<sup>1</sup> The grim holidays of the convicts were at an end.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. G. C. Ives, *A History of Penal Methods*, London, 1914, p. 166.

## ARCHBISHOP ULLATHORNE

The outbreaks in the island became more and more violent in consequence; and this coincides, as we have said, with the arrival of Archbishop, then Dr., Ullathorne. This is his account of the aftermath of a certain mutiny. 'And now I have to record the most heartbreaking scene that I have ever witnessed. The prison was in the form of a square, on one side of which stood a row of low cells, covered with a roof of shingle. The turnkey unlocked the first door and said: "Stand aside, Sir!" There came forth a yellow exhalation, the produce of the bodies of the men confined therein. The exhalation cleared off, and I entered and found five men chained to a traversing bar. I spoke to them from my heart, and after preparing them and obtaining their names, I announced to them who were reprieved from death, and which of them were to die after five days had passed. I thus went from cell to cell until I had seen them all. It is a literal fact that each man who heard of his condemnation to death went down on his knees, with dry eyes, and thanked God. Among the thirteen who were condemned to execution three only were Catholics, but four of the others put themselves under my care. I arranged to begin my duties with them at six o'clock the next morning, and got an intelligent Catholic overseer appointed to read at certain times under my direction for those who could not read, whilst I was engaged with the others. Night had now fallen, and I proceeded to Government House, where I found a brilliant assembly, in strange contrast with the human miseries in which my soul had just been steeped. It may seem strange to the inexperienced that so many men should prefer death to life in that dreadful penal settlement. Let me, then, say that all the criminals who were executed in New South Wales were imbued with a like feeling. I have heard it from several in their last moments, and Father McEncroe, in a letter to me, which I quoted to Sir William Molesworth's Committee on Transportation, affirmed that he had attended seventy-four executions in four years, and that the greater number of criminals had, on their way to the

## ARCHBISHOP ULLATHORNE

scaffold, thanked God that they were not going to Norfolk Island.

“There were two thousand convicts on the island, all of them men, retransported for new crimes, after having been first transported to New South Wales. Many of them had, at one time or other, received sentence of death. They were a desperate body of men, made more desperate by their isolation from the outer world; by being deprived of access to all stimulants; by the absence of hope; by the habitual prospect of the encircling sea that isolated them from other lands by the distance of a thousand miles; and by the absence of all religious or other instruction or consolation.’

The aforesaid Captain Maconochie, who came out to the Island in 1840, as Governor, in relief of Major Anderson and found 1400 convicts in double irons, was a kinder-hearted, but Puritan character, who introduced some softening in the worst asperities of the prison rules. He even allowed the convicts their tobacco. But, after four years, because of his leniency, he was succeeded by Major Childs; and it was under his rule and that of his successor in 1846, Mr. John Price, that the severity of repression reached to its zenith and that the doom of the convicts was most awful and most absolute. It will culminate, as we shall see, with a terrible mutiny; and then, for a few last years, the repression becomes so hopeless and so severe that, in the end, the settlement is abandoned.

It is said that two thirds of the convicts perished on the island. For the slightest misdemeanour a sentence was increased so that there was little hope of eventual release. Every circumstance of their daily life was sordid and horrible. The convicts were dressed in brown and yellow clothing of frieze. They were required to cap each private soldier whom they met, and even each empty sentry box that they passed. They tore their food with their fingers and teeth, and drank for the most part out of water buckets. Tobacco, once it was removed from them, became their greatest luxury. They would frequently give a shill-

## THE AUGEAN STABLE

ing for the privilege of burning out an old wooden pipe, the inside lined with tin, probably used for smoking for many months past, and which had become clogged with the oil of tobacco. They would put a piece of ignited charcoal in the bowl of the pipe and suck away until the oil was exhausted. This was their height of luxury.

A close view of this appalling purgatory is to be obtained in the writings of a certain W. H. Barber. This man, who had been a solicitor, was involved in a celebrated case of embezzlement and fraud and sentenced to transportation. He was innocent; but no one would listen to his protestations and, in accordance with the new attempts to make Norfolk Island as stringent a prison as possible, this man, who had never been to prison before, was sent directly to Norfolk Island, arriving there in 1842. He spent seven years on the island and on his return home, we may add, was accorded a free pardon, but never obtained any other compensation for his suffering in this hell. Soon after arrival Barber was made wardsman of his ward. He was, that is to say, put in charge of a ward containing some two hundred desperate ruffians who were locked in, undisturbed from about eight p.m. until six o'clock in the morning. Any attempt on his part to enforce order would have ended, as he said, in a dangerous or even murderous attack upon himself, committed in perfect impunity under the cloak of numbers. During that long night the convicts were never allowed to leave their dormitory for any purpose whatever; and for their conveniences big wooden tubs or barrels were disposed at regular intervals down the room. It was his duty, each morning, to carry down these forty tubs to the seashore, there to empty their contents and thoroughly clean and scour them. Each tub required a separate journey to the seashore and this noisome work took the whole morning to complete. After that, he had to make the beds of his two hundred companions, running the risk again of their violence if anything was not to their liking. Sordid as it was, the task that this wretched man had to accom-

## PRISONERS OF THE PLAIN

plish, day after day, was comparable to a labour of Hercules. And, all the while, he was conscious of his innocence of the crime for which he had been convicted. Time after time his health broke down: but again and again he was returned to this Augean stable.

It is possible, from his narrative, to draw a picture of the nocturnal horror of Norfolk Island; but, for the completion of its lurid colours, it is necessary to turn to the evidence, once again, of Archbishop Ullathorne. This is what he says: 'There is another class of crime too frightful even for the imagination of other lands, which was unknown to the savage until taught by the convict. I have gone through a great deal of pain and torture of mind in consequence of the horrors which I have witnessed in the penal settlements, and I have such an intense conscientious feeling upon that subject, and of the result of these evils in the thorough breaking up of the moral man, which ensues from the crime, that I would do anything that is lawful, I would even deliberately give my life, if I could in any manner lawfully contribute to the removal of that evil. I allude to unnatural crime.' This was on the second visit of Archbishop Ullathorne to the island: and we are now approaching the appalling mutiny of 1844. We will interpolate the following extract from the official report, in explanation of what is to come. 'In the removal of the cooking utensils from the prisoners I cannot see a sufficient reason for the murderous outbreak of July last, except in what I gathered from some of the murderers prior to their deaths. Horrible though it be, I consider that I am bound to make known to you what I learnt from them shortly before their execution. Many of these wretched beings acknowledged to me that for years, indeed, almost from their first conviction, they had been given to unnatural practices, declaring that the crime prevailed to a great extent, both in Van Diemen's Land and in this island; and from one I learnt that those who pandered to their passions were paid in tobacco, extra provisions, fancy articles made for them,



## THE KITCHEN MUTINY

and any indulgencies they could obtain to induce them to yield to their brutal desires. That, being deprived of their cooking utensils, they would be unable to prepare the food they might surreptitiously obtain for the objects of their lust; and that this aroused their savage and ferocious passions to a pitch of madness. This is the tale of a man about to die. The relation of these abominable practices came from men who in a few days knew they must be numbered with the dead; and I have no reason to doubt the horrible confession. The address of another convict to myself on entering his cell, was to this effect: "Sir, as you value your soul, separate both here and at Van Diemen's Land, as much as possible, my class of people. We are nearly all given to unnatural practices. I have witnessed scenes which you would not believe were I to recount them, and which are not fit to be related. The flashmen you see with made overclothes and fancy articles are given to these practices. No check can be given to it but by separating the men as far as possible, and I beseech you to use your best endeavours to let the men sleep in cells." "

These confessions at the eleventh hour, when about to die, are the aftermath of the mutiny; but, now, being informed of its hidden truths, we must return to the moment of that explosion and hearken to its howls and cries of rage. The mutinous condition of the convicts had become worse and worse and the Tasmanian Government sent out a magistrate, Mr. R. P. Stewart, who, after investigation on the spot, advised Major Childs of the need for greater severity on his part. Even so, there were in the dungeons twenty-one prisoners awaiting trial, who had been imprisoned for eleven months in seven small cells, loaded with the heaviest irons.<sup>1</sup> The most severe measures were decided upon and put immediately into operation. When the men were in their berths at night the cooking vessels were taken away from them, because the convicts were in the habit of stealing and killing the government sheep and cooking the mutton for themselves, doing the same with the

<sup>1</sup>G. C. Ives, *A History of Penal Methods*, 1914, pp. 166-167.

## PITCAIRNERS

officers' poultry. As soon as the convicts were roused in the morning they realized what had happened. In a mob five hundred strong, howling with rage, they rushed in a seething mass to the stores. They overpowered the warders, took their guns from them, and started to kill. Two constables, a gatekeeper and an overseer were slain and their bodies torn limb from limb in their lust for blood. The soldiers came up and fired into the convicts, killing several of them. Their raging liberty was short lived. By nightfall the mutiny was quelled. The ringleaders, heavily ironed, were locked into dark cells. The wild beasts were back again, locked into their cages. All night long there must have been feverish discussions in the long wards. From the next morning no mercy was shewn. Repression was intensified and hell darkened, as it were, for doom. Twenty-nine of the prisoners were kept for trial; and on 23 September 1846, fourteen of them were hung in front of all the rest, kicking off their shoes gaily, so we are told, into the crowd, as they stood, in turn, underneath the gallows. The dead bodies were put, still in irons, into their coffins, and were drawn away. This was the end of the masters who had tried to give their pupils a holiday. They were hung in front of their friends and paramours; and it is probable that there was not a man among the convicts who did not envy them their end.

After this, nearly a decade came of leaden-handed authority. Major Childs had been removed; and, in his stead, a noted disciplinarian, Mr. John Price, an ex-magistrate, came out as governor.<sup>1</sup> More and more prisoners serving life sentences were sent out. But, in the year 1855, most of the convicts were removed and the penal settlement of Norfolk Island was closed for ever. In the following year, 1856, the Pitcairn Islanders, descendants of the mutineers of 1789 of H.M.S. *Bounty*, arrived, 194 in number, on board H.M.S. *Morayshire*. A few years later many of their number were returned, at their own request, to Pitcairn Island.

<sup>1</sup>G. C. Ives, *A History of Penal Methods*, 1914, p. 167.

## THE JANISSARIES

So ends the history of Norfolk Island. It finishes, as we have said, in 1855, but its climax came, nine years earlier, with the kitchen mutiny. It is to that time that we return. The kitchen mutiny, as an episode, is of epical importance in the adventures, or purgatory, of the doomed. The mutinous convicts become, in symbol, the ferocious bodyguard or Janissaries of evil. The food of the Janissaries, it will be remembered, was laid out for them on their huge kettledrums, under the plane trees, outside the great gate of the Seraglio, or Sublime Porte. It was their custom, in order to make show of their ferocity, to leap ravenously upon this food. They tore the food with their fingers and teeth, as did the felons of Norfolk Island. Their dress, too, was designed to instil terror; and we may be sure that, if the principle had come under their notice, they would have adopted the cloth masks of the convicts, for the hood-beak is an even more terrifying headgear than the high caps and folded flaps of felt of the Janissary. There is, also, this similarity, that the Janissaries, like the bulk of the convicts, had been set apart from early childhood for their doom of battle. In the end, after an existence, as a military body, of many centuries, their extermination was decided upon and, in 1826, the massacre of the Janissaries was so thorough as to leave scarcely any survivors. The signal with which the massacre began was the taking away of their kettledrums, forming an extraordinary parallel to the start of the kitchen mutiny upon Norfolk Island. In the same way that the throbbing of the kettledrums was, with the Janissaries, their token of battle, had the kitchen mutiny succeeded in its purpose, had the warders been murdered to a man and the copper cooking-utensils been recovered, it would have been with the beating of these immature kettledrums that the convicts would have celebrated their liberty.

We must look upon them, therefore, in some senses, as a bodyguard formed under pressure of necessity for the retention or preservation of evil. But there is more than one antichrist. Their persecution is at the hands of a body which is still more

## THE CONSTABLE OF CASTILE

wicked, and which pretends to good. It is a continual warfare, but all the facilities of death are upon one side. In the end, the prisoners are abject in their hell; and the only purpose of it seems to be to feed the brutal propensities of their gaolers. Warder McChuskey, listening at every door, always watching, and even climbing into a tree and keeping perfectly still in the leaves in order to spy upon the convicts, is the dark angel of a false judgement day. The felons who flagellate their fellow convicts, and delight in it, have apocalyptic importance. The word 'constable', at Norfolk Island as at Port Arthur, along the narrow waters guarding the Styx, with ever wakeful Cerberus at his side, becomes transformed from its ordinary meaning. Its import is transcendentalized. This is no longer the police constable of the country lanes, the slum streets, the fetters and the cells. It is a figure of heraldic blazonry, of shining or black armour; some Gothic champion or knight, the Constable, the Condestabile, Pedro Hernandez de Velasco, Conde de Haro, Constable of Castile, who is buried in the chapel of his family in Burgos Cathedral: who died in 1492, in the year when a new world was discovered; and who, as Constable of Castile, fought the Moors, so that his life was consecrated to the destruction of a different, and darker race. The castles of Castile and lions of Aragón are implicit in his name. The black and white squares of the chessboard darken with the castles and the pawns. Knights ride by loud starlight over the fields: mitred bishops and veiled queens ride by in palanquins. The turbaned Moors, close cropped and pigtailed, lose the battle. Their Turk's heads are struck off; or they are chained to a bench and, as galley-slaves, they pull the banks of oars in a frothing ocean. The constable in his surcoat of lions and castles, or of hearts and diamonds, is the knave of the playing cards, the clown of the tarot pack. It is a game of chivalry and cruelty, of good and evil. It is played for ever; and there is ever a losing side. It is the destruction of a different and darker race.

They were taken to Norfolk Island, into the outer ocean, to

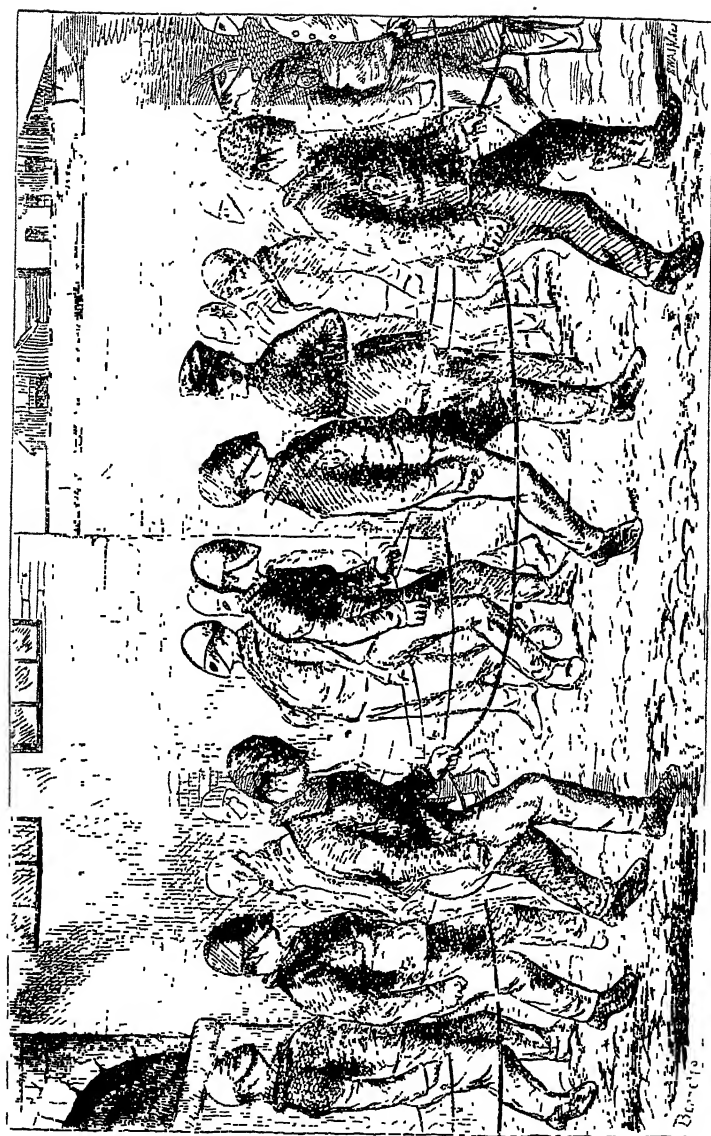
## THE CONSTABLE OF CASTILE

be slain slowly, and in secret. That satellite isle, the lunar, the excoriated rim, heaves into vision. It is a high mound of red clay, with every blade of grass gone and a few solitary pine trees growing upon it. From here the earthly paradise is seen; the groves of guava, the lemon and the loquat trees. Flocks of white doves flash their wings: there are turtledoves, and tumblers falling, falling in the flowering air; the noise of sweet waters, flocks of the golden fleece, smoke rising, and every sound of home. It is a summer morning. But the warning trumpet sounds. The cells are opened. The yellow vapour, or the exhalation rises. Warder McChuskey brings the day. And, in the hollow square, the gallow's shadow crawls along the ground. This is the felon's envy: not the sweet airs of the morning.





VI  
INFERNO





## VI INFERNO

*(in the manner of Hieronymus Bosch)*

THIS is the unearthly, or incorporeal hell. This is the phantasmagoria of the clouded North: the pelting rain, the hailstorm and blue-white drugget of the fleecy snow: bare rocks, red fire, and emptiness. And yet it seethes, or swarms. The scene is crowded as for judgement day. The red fires are lit with sticks: the rocks are rocks, or bones: the rain strikes hard. It is expressed in symbols that are subterhuman, infinitely small. There is no reality: only the linking of detail that gives circumstance. Truth lasts no longer: improbability and monstrous birth stand in its stead. Intricate engines, that are mills without a millpond, grind out nothingness. Where is the miller's daughter? Green-eyed auricula, living below the frame of the wheel and its latticed sails. From whom the meal or the flour shook, if she was shaken. Green and black eyed; with golden whorl or corolla, golden mane of the parhelion to her pupils. That was long, long ago in the orchard, listening to the mill waters. The dusty miller's daughter still sits and sews. The mill grinds nothingness. Her hands are on her lap of bonts. Her needles are a nail and a fingerbone. Her eyes are empty eye sockets: their green and black blossoms have been eaten into emptiness. What has become of the others? Her sister of the dewponds, of the beds of watercress, lies for ever in the tideless tresses, like a dead fly in a spider's web, until wind blows upon the web of waters. Her hands and feet are gone: chrysalis-like the weeds wrap her round, embalming her. The cocoon of her, or mummied body, has a ferment of froth and bubbles upon the hem of her graveclothes, clinging to them. And

## THE EGG BIRTH

where is the dancer? Oh! lift the hinges. Look into the casket. She lies there, uncorrupted, with heavy-lidded eyes, fast, fast asleep: and dreaming. Oh! not dreaming! Her mouth was ever dumb: she spoke not with her lips. They have lost their red life and are pale and bloodless. Her nostrils, that were like the leaves of the tulip tree, have no tinge nor taint upon them. It is worse that she is uncorrupted and can never wake. She moved in melody: and now is melting and deliquescent. Her virgin body is untouched, unloved,

Monstrous birth, or pullulation, swarms around; most of all the egg birth, the breaking of the shell. It is a roc's egg tilted on two legs, two ostrich eggs. This bulges like the wooden horse of Troy; with a boat's crew ready to board the enemy. They burst the egg shell and are fighting from the first breath, as monsters that are born with teeth, take the teat into their toothed mouths, and tear it with their fangs. There are ostrich horsemen born from the roc's egg as they ride, cracking the carapace. The shore is strewn with immense fishes, stranded in a spring tide, like upturned boats. Their bellies are slit open by a knife that is still quivering in its pocket of flesh, and the gaping cut discloses the matrix or conglomerate of eggs, a million at a birth. Above this, in an air that is blackened with smoke, the bat clings head downwards to a beam and gives birth, in inversion. It is the mirror-birth, or catachresis, the fugue inverted. Monstrous parturition swells and breaks among the clouds. They are swollen bellies disgorging frogs and toads. It rains little fishes, eels in a slant of rain and water snakes. The earth bears monstrous fungi; black domes with milky caves, leprous toadstools, the rust of the elm bark swollen to cancer, a town of white tents sprung up in a night, the smoky puffball, all the poison-bearing tribe.

Above the ground there is battle. The fat fight the thin; the purses give battle to the moneyboxes. They have legs and arms and fight on foot. Wood strikes iron and out rings the money. There is jangling coin littering the ground and none to



THE INFERNO, BY HIERONYMUS BOSCH  
*Isaiah Anderson photo*



## TIRELIRES ET COFFRES-FORTS

pick it up. Were it not for Death this would be the land of Cockaigne; and we see plains of corn, ripe as a honeycomb, but reddened in the conflagration. It is reaped by a skeleton, who works naked in the summer heat, but for a wide-brimmed hat, a peasant's hat plaited from the straw. But his bony frame, that is so thin against the red hills of hell, is the pelvis of an insect. His legs and arms have three joints, not two. The articulation is different and he has, not hands, but the claws of a beetle, a hairy spider's hands, not human, nor yet animal. Death reaps the harvest; and the peasants of Cockaigne lie dead face-downwards, by the bagpipes and the bottles. The shepherdess who wandered into the cornfield is impaled upon the golden barbs. They are barbed spears transfixing her, of bearded wheatstalks. They are long golden shafts lifted from the stook, the piled spears, the taken arms of corn. The women of Cockaigne, who carried food to the reapers down the golden lanes, along the path of the sickle, they lie dead and ravished. The red poppies in the cornfield are pale with fire, and the blue cornflower has lost the blue of August. The land of Cockaigne is burnt and laid waste. The skeleton turns and comes reaping in our way.

There are figures in human shape, but in burlesque like the fun of carnival. All are scullions, or executioners, low swineherds, or those who when you are lost in the wood do not understand the tongue you speak. They answer in rough patois; or will not lift their heads. They are charcoal burners: or, bear-like, live upon the berries. And they will not help, but shamble off as a bear upon a chain.

The mediaeval mind, which could not form the image of emptiness, opens the world again from the wood's edge. It is the Inferno of the drolls. That burnt plain is seething with the spawn of fancy. Every form of life, or creation, is parodied in this bestiary. It is the comedy of accident or misfortune. Those accidents that only befall the world of insects are inflicted on all creation. The crushing of the Lilliputians; the deadly fascination of the flame; the singeing of their wings; the loss of three or four

## ADAM AND EVE

of their limbs; the drowning in a raindrop; their clothes caught alight and burning in the rainbow; the dead leaves flaring down like meteors and destroying all; this is the drama in little, but it is heightened to the fires of hell.

A naked man and woman; they are Adam and Eve, a king and queen, or a lover and his mistress, are caught up and entangled, not in a spider's web, but in the long strings of a harp. They face each other through the meshes, which are the bars of their prison and, at the same time, as they move, plectrumlike they strike the strings. The wind howls incessantly through the wires. They are far enough apart not to touch with their hands; and the image of their torment is as if they struggled incessantly in water, in a Dead Sea in which they could not drown. The liquid notes sound all round them. They can neither sink nor swim.

There are a million monsters, the mules or fancies of the breed. Speckled or mottled, frilled or picotee'd, wire-edged or laced with gold or silver, damascened or ravaged with disease, pockmarked, spotted, particoloured like fools, lozenged, diapered, chequered black and white. There are lobster gauntlets, the spike-headed visor, crustacean breastplates, swan-crested helms, all the gamut of chivalry brought low for mockery. The Seven Virtues, or the Seven Deadly Sins, all alike are at the mercy of the drolls. There is no difference in the drama; but no two actors are alike. The red fires of hell are ever in view; and spawning out of the mouth of hell come the dwarfish servitors, the trolls and monsters in diminution. It is the reign of unreason, of the illogical. Dolphins, harnessed and bridled, are swimming in the air; and the earth crawls with centipedes, which are man-footed, under a plated body creeping to the assault. These centipedes are shod with shoes, no two alike; in rat-tail fancy; soft doeskins for the lawns of dew; in wintry lamb's wool; of steel for the stirrup and jointed like a lobster shell; or curled up disdainful of the ground, and held with a golden chain to the knee. They are only feet and no heads. Or there is a face, whiskered

## LES CULS DE JATTE

like a cat, with fins for hands and the body of a snail, its whorled shell before it, and following in slime. There are moths and butterflies who are veiled princesses; from the thin spire or steeple of their hats the long veils and wimples come down to the earth, and they wear long sleeves that are frilled like the edges of a leaf and slashed to show the colour underneath. As they walk they wave their painted wings. These temptresses are intangible and fade upon the air.

The beggars who crawl upon their hands and knees are mocked. There are others, face downwards like the beasts of the field, who cannot stand upright but creep painfully, a wooden stick or peg in either hand, their maimed legs strapped into a wooden stump; or who, sitting in a little cart, must push themselves backwards with two wooden poles; some who cannot even move, but are carried and put down, the mere bole of a man with lopped branches and without any leaves, who wait with sightless eyes till they are fetched again. The lepers ring their warning bells, and wear a high white hat or dunce's cap. They are made comic in their misery. The epileptics fall foaming to the ground. The cripples throw away their crutches and fall flat. Rich and poor are, alike, tormented. The rich lose everything; but the poor had never anything to lose. The Inferno is a raging sea that is alive with monsters. It is a hell where there is never silence; no loveliness, nor pity; no respite from ugliness, every horror of propinquity in common poverty; the pinching and tweaking, more than the torturing of souls. •

Such is the Inferno as it is painted by Hieronymus Bosch. Of all the primitive painters he has been the least studied. His work, which has a present relevance to be expounded later, is scattered far and wide, and has never yet been properly exhibited nor published.<sup>1</sup> Of his still existing pictures it is calculated that two

<sup>1</sup>He was born, at Bois-le-Duc in Holland, in about 1450; and his correct name, of Jerome van Aken, became contracted into Bosch because of the Dutch name of that capital of Northern Brabant, which is 's Hertogenbosch. He died in his native town in 1516; a date which, considering the remote an-

## ICONOGRAPHY OF BOSCH

thirds are to be seen in Spain. No less than thirty of his authentic pictures remain in that country; and it is probable that expert search would find more. Their presence in Spain is due, in chief part, to the purchases of Philip II, who bought them from Don Felipe de Guevara, the son of Diego de Guevara who was painted by Roger van der Weyden and who had charge of the tapestries of Margaret of Austria. The Grand Inquisitor, Don Nino de Guevara, of whom the superb portrait by El Greco now hangs in the Metropolitan at New York, was the great nephew, it would seem, of Don Diego de Guevara. The last-named will have purchased his pictures directly from Hieronymus Bosch.

Philip II bought every picture by Hieronymus Bosch upon which he could lay his hands. He sent nine of them to the Escorial; and upon his death, in 1598, there were, in addition, twelve pictures by Bosch in the palace at Madrid, and eight at the palace of El Pardo. Many of these will have been destroyed in the disastrous fire of 1734 when the Royal Palace at Madrid was burnt to the ground and, in addition to the many treasures by Titian and Rubens, it is said that a third of the whole output of Velazquez was lost for ever. Where Hieronymus Bosch is concerned this fire, therefore, accounts for another serious gap in his lifework. Among the few remaining pictures by his hand it is necessary to mention, as the most important, the triptych of the *Creation* at the Escorial, and a round tondo of *Christ and the Crown of Thorns*; a picture in the Colegio del Patriarca at Valencia; a *Temptation of St. Anthony*, in the Museo Civico at Padua; and his masterpiece, another *Temptation of St. Anthony*,

the latter of which he represents, is the more remarkable, since Botticelli died in 1510 and Raphael, not till 1520. Little enough is known of his life, but one thing, at least, is certain; that he lived in Bois-le-Duc for eight years, from 1494 till 1502, painting pictures for the Cathedral, all of which compositions were destroyed, in 1629, by Frederick Henry of Nassau, when he took the town from the Spaniards. It is, also, probable that Bosch designed the stained glass windows of the Cathedral, which perished at the same time. Owing to this circumstance, many of the best works of his mature powers, occupying nearly a decade of his life, have disappeared entirely from knowledge.



## THE BURGUNDIAN PLAIN

from the gallery at Lisbon. This was lately exhibited in Paris, in 1935, where it attracted much attention. Its presence at Lisbon must be due, in all probability, to Philip II, who, from 1581, was King of Portugal as well as Spain. There are, also, the superb tapestries woven from his pictures in the Royal Palace at Madrid. These will have been commissioned in Flanders and woven by Flemish weavers, to the orders of Don Diego de Guevara, who, as we have seen, was in charge of the tapestries of Margaret of Austria, a most formidable and tremendous collection comprising, for those who love tapestry, the finest works of art of Northern Europe. The tapestries after Hieronymus Bosch in the palace at Madrid, are little known but will, one day, receive the admiration they deserve. They require, indeed, a chapter to themselves in the history of tapestry.

The taste of Philip II for Hieronymus Bosch is in accord with his character, as it is popularly known. He is represented as fanatical, narrow-viewed, and bigoted. But he was, also, the patron of Titian, and one of the greatest connoisseurs of painting there has ever been. His liking for Hieronymus Bosch is given curious contradiction in his patronage of the Venetian painters of the High Renaissance. But the explanation of this apparent discrepancy lies in his Flemish upbringing. His father, Charles V, who was born at Ghent, looked upon himself as, above all else, a Fleming; and this choice or predilection out of so heterogeneous an ancestry descended, also, to Philip II. Hieronymus Bosch, to Philip II, will have meant the mediaeval Netherlands that he remembered in childhood, presented in more realism than, for instance, in the works of Memling. It was the Lowland or Burgundian past, replete with the legends and superstitions of that dialectal plain. Bois-le-Duc, itself, was in the hereditary dominions of Philip II; and nothing but the differences in their uncouth patois divided the origins of Memling and Brueghel, of Hieronymus Bosch and Roger van der Weyden.

Hieronymus Bosch enjoyed, indeed, a tremendous reputation in those lands. The first works that Brueghel had to execute

## DIABLERIES

when he entered the print shop of Jerome Cock, at Antwerp, after 1553, were a series of prints designed by him after the pictures of Bosch. This was nearly forty years after the death of that painter. The success of these prints induced Brueghel to become for a time the successor, as it were, to Hieronymus Bosch; and his experiments in the diabolic vein continued, at intervals, all through his life. It was only during his last few years, from 1560 perhaps, until his death in 1569, that he developed into the extraordinary painter that he was to become. The painter of the *Winter Landscapes*, the *Triumph of Death*, or any of the other works of his maturity, has advanced into unexpected directions, when his early series of prints are remembered. But this consideration has, in itself, thrown some discredit upon the master from whom he derived his inspiration. For, where 'diableries' are concerned, Brueghel was only the disciple and it was Bosch who was his precursor. He must be judged upon his own merits as a painter; and not upon those works by Brueghel that are an experiment in his manner, undertaken before that painter of a younger generation had discovered his own true bent. It is a fact, though, that this attitude of mind is difficult to achieve before the works of Bosch are studied seriously and can emerge from the limbo of neglect and false attribution in which they are still involved.

The beginnings of their appeal to the aesthetic senses, once the correct focus towards them has been established, are of a different nature from those that are induced by the paintings of Brueghel. The *Temptation of St. Anthony*, from Lisbon, to take an instance, will cause surprise by its fresh and daring colours. Those who have looked negligently upon Hieronymus Bosch as the precursor of Cruikshank, or even of Sir Noel Paton, must come to the opinion that this is something more important than mere fantasy in illustration. It is of a tireless and constructive ingenuity, and is the epic or abracadabra of mediæval doubts and beliefs. It is, also, in no uncertain sense, a mood or mirror into which the minds of men have inclined in order

## IMAGES OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS

to look upon their souls. This inner doubtfulness, this lack of hope, is a recurrent thing in history; and, whenever it appears, these woods and thickets of the subconscious self become as entangled and as intricately inhabited as in a picture by Bosch. The *Temptation of St. Anthony* is one of his masterpieces; and in this, or in his immense triptych at the Escorial, we find the echo of that situation into which the folly of mankind has, once again, engaged its energy and its powers of creation. Hieronymus Bosch is the earliest artist in whom we can recognize the liberation of the inner or subconscious self. It appears in his pictures more densely peopled than any bestiary. There is not an empty corner left uninhabited by the imagination. The chain of the daydream unrolls itself into actual fact. Metaphorical figures that have no logical connexion, but in the far-fetched hyperbole of a dream, are allowed their undisputed licence, and reality is contradicted at every turn and at each opportunity. It is by this freedom of his senses that Hieronymus Bosch is lifted into a contemporary importance to ourselves that has no parallel in the work of any other man.

To our generation, who are struggling in the trough left behind by a century of reason and materialism, there is a direct communication coming to us out of the Inferno that he imagined. The disaster to which the logical and unsuperstitious nineteenth century directed our feet has only just reached to us. It seems, now, as if the last war was only the foretaste of what is to come; as if the new and terrible toys that have been invented have only just found their way into our hands and have not yet been played with in all their potentiality of evil. In neighbouring countries treaties are scrapped with cynical assurance, and political rivals, or private citizens, are 'liquidated' with an unembarrassed ease that would be incredible to any of the dead of the nineteenth century, could they be awakened. A century of sincere belief, and of an atheism that was no less high-principled and dour, took all things into account and saw purpose and reason in everything around them. But the contradiction that is

## THE WIND OF THE INFERNO

essential in every ensuing generation has brought about, in our time, just those predicaments in which the nineteenth century refused to believe. It is because our fathers denied anything that they could not see with their eyes or touch with their hands; but it is not least of the contradictions by which their dead lives are, now, vitiated and broken that the purposeless and the unreasonable, in things human and divine, is given equal credence. The conception of an Inferno, or of a living state, in which the innocent are made to suffer as well as the guilty, or, perhaps, their sufferings may be worse still because of their guilelessness, is the direct result of this disbelief in reason. In an equal sense, the wicked take the rewards of virtue. They end their lives in success; and, after that, who cares? It is, above all else, the innocent who suffer. If there is a supreme being he has made mistakes and is, more often than not, unjust. It is not only conceit but certain kinds of innocence, as well, that he loves to torment. He is made in man's image; and not man in his.

The theory of unreasonable suffering is proved on every page of the preceding part of this book; and it would be as easy to draw up a theory of unreasonable reward. These two theories, taken together, would still leave in their midst a modicum, of those who have escaped notice. This neuter body is the public, or *demos*, who are allowed to vote and will be driven to the slaughter. Meanwhile, like the audience in the bull-ring, they applaud the agile matador and laugh at the disembowelling of the horses. The true point of that spectacle can only appeal to a limited number of the onlookers; and, in the same way, this Inferno, or this picture of the damned, points its message to the few with insistent emphasis. Not to be rich, nor poor; not to capitulate and bow down before the false; to abstain from the spectacle and be no part of that audience; this is the safety that there is not in the crowd. Madness is in the numbers and the masses. It blows this way and that; a catpaw of wind and then the senseless storm. It turns and rends: the lulling of a breeze blows into the tempest and the kettledrums. It passes on; and

## THE WIND OF THE INFERNO

there is nothing left but thunder in the distance and the ruined harvest. The treasure that is in oneself is not so easy to destroy. It is growing cold again for rain; the world darkens and it is time to gather behind walls. Faith is gone, religion; and the whirring of the world is heard. This is known at the dead of night, in between the ticking of the clock; but, now, it sounds above the shouting and the storm. This is the time to take shelter. Men run here and there and no one has a plan. The world has a rim of fire. No man knows whither it will blow.

The interior treasure is not so easily destroyed. Those are more quickly blinded who live by the eyes alone. The solitude is not invaded. It is the sheep pens that have fences of wattle and that catch the fire. In the town the churches and the bull rings burn. Men wear masks and the gas fog crawls along the earth. There are eagles in the high air and the rushing of their wings is heard. They hover and threaten and are hidden in the clouds.

We are in the first circle of hell. The whirlwind, like an animal thing, blows round and round the dreadful gulf, like a wild beast taught to this torment. It can be seen coming; blown farther away round the circle only in order that it should come nearer. And the pit falls out of sight to the terror of the senses. There is nothing for the mind, not a single foothold, nothing but the rushing wind. The inferno of the drolls has come. They drip forth from the red fangs of hell. They creep out of every crevice and from under every stone. The monsters of the conscience invade us from within. It is a man-made hell. We could make a heaven and have made a hell. Each monstrosity is mechanically contrived, born in a pseudo birth and given fertility like the spawning of the fishes. Good and bad are multiplied with no discrimination between their kinds. Engines of death are as many as the instruments of life. Where are the architects; and where the poets? Where are the painters to draw the man-made world? The bonds and chains are broken, but freedom comes too late. Men creep back into their caves. The dugout and the gas mask have arrived.

## THE SNAIL SHELL

This is the Inferno of the innocent. Their hideous houses, built along the arteries or roads, are the monsters of a mediaeval hell, a human soul inhabiting a hulk or shell; or a tub or barrel given hands and feet. It is the houses that move and not the ribbon of the road. The octopus-town has these parasites upon its limbs, who leave their shells to work for tokens and bring back their food. They hate their work and hate their snail-shell houses. The vapour of their discontent rises into the empty heaven, the uninhabited or after-world. It is only the surface of the earth that swarms with life. The wings of metal glitter in the sky; but at no more distance than two hours' walk upon the land. It is the sweet-breath morning only five miles high and, above that, utter emptiness, where the light is purple or is black as wine.

The bestiary is flat, crawling, serpentlike, upon the curving of the earth, condemned to its limits. War and peace, religion and brave doubt, are dwellers in our inmost selves. They are spawned by us and not acknowledged, but are found in their bastardy and recognized. We must have the picture of this writhing world. It conveniently forgets. It invents a heaven and a hell when either is in its power to make. It never reasons, and never once remembers. It pours out its fevers and prays at them for more. It comes back, snail-like, and crisscrosses in its slime. Every time, it wonders and it never understands. It thinks that those footsteps are always new and have never crossed before. And yet they shine with phosphorescent light, as St. Elmo's fire or the lantern of the marshes. That is for a warning and a sign; but none will heed it.

Improvement is deterioration. The world grown wiser is its wisdom gone. The machines are working but we have lost the arts. Our degradation spreads along the winds. There is no corner of the world that is not sullied with our news. The man-made hell confirms itself and strengthens. It spreads its poison where men's skins are darker, and insidiously comes back to us, breathed out by their hatred. Now they have their centres

## RED DOLOMITES

where it spreads unchecked. It is one huge Hell, and every soul is in it. The spawning of the masses is allowed and fostered. Grain is stored up and, close by, men are starving. The superfluity is burnt, or sent down in the waters: none is shared among the hungry. This is the world grown wise; and who is there to love it? Its ends and aims are all destruction. It is bent on death and will not take the dagger from its heart. Hand after hand twists upon that hilt and the poisoned point is thrust still farther in the wound.

This inferno, then, is peopled by ourselves. It is the macabre fancy, but maddened in our image. The hidden or internal devil has come out and the earth is blighted. The yellow miasma or the exhalation rises. It is the produce of the bodies of the men and women confined therein. There comes no turnkey to unlock the door and the exhalation never clears. Down in its darkness men and women are chained together; and nothing could be done but to prepare them and to obtain their names. Some are reprieved from death and others are to die. But they do not even fall upon their knees. There is no God to thank.

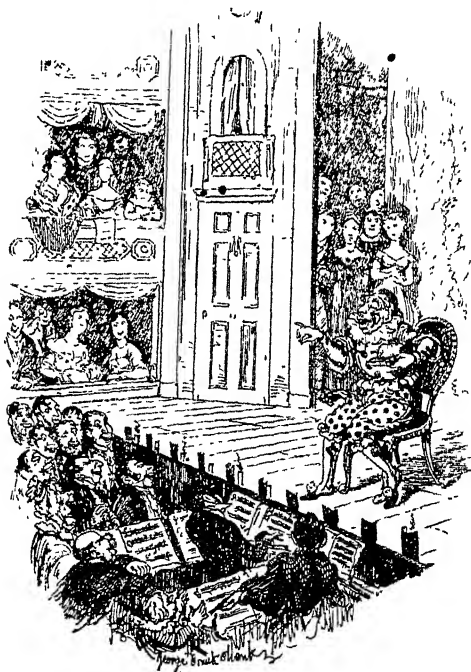
The pit has red dolomites, and the dizzying depths drop into infinity and never end. The hell of Hieronymus Bosch opens its horrors of irrelevance. His bestiary of the subconscious mind, in insane mythology, inhabits and increases in the fire. Birth from the ovum splits and cracks the eggshell carapace. The beauties of an hour have the bright bills of birds and are inviolable. Anthropomorphic changes make a hell where the souls dwell and the bodies never meet. Eye sees eye, but there is never the touch of hands. Those who were apart in life are not together in death. The phantasmagoria creates reality and transcends the truth. Is this better; or that life should end in nothing? There is this, or nothingness. The survival of the soul cannot touch us till we touch the dead men's hands. And, when that comes, we shall have lost the living.

Then, it may be morning in the lawns and meadows. Made in man's image, a little boy is held up and begins to walk. His

## ENVOI

hair is soft for he is hardly six months old. He has a rounded face, made round to please, and in surety of innocence. He laughs, and tries to speak; and must be held up or he will sag and fall.

In his innocence there is, at least, no difference between the expression in the eyes and the answer of the heart. He laughs and leaps again, for his little life is loving and he cannot speak or walk. It is the time of cowslips. The lambs are in the meadows, close under the fleecy clouds of April. This is his innocence, as the sweet-breath day is guileless. This is deep in the fields, and you can hear the whirring of the world. It is his mother holding him. His life is a little heart beating underneath the hand. It is alive and living: and while there is this there is a heaven. It is held in men's hands and has no thought of hell. Of the dead and the living. The living know not: and the dead can never tell.





## INDEX

- Abyssinia, 112, 113  
 Adam, Adolphe, ballet composer, 128, 289  
 Ajanta, the world of, 55  
 Ajanta, men and women of, 182  
 d'Albanie, Comtesse de, widow of the Young Pretender, 239  
 Alexander I, the St. Petersburg of, 80  
 Alfieri, Italian poet, 239  
 Angas, G. F., *Sketches of New Zealand*, 1847, 137  
 Antirrhinum, 27  
 Arabesque of Schumann, 83, 84  
 Aran Islands, 109  
 Arthur, Port, Tasmanian penal settlement, 371-373  
 Auricula, varieties of, 25, 26, 27  
  
 Bach, Anna Magdalena, 258  
 Bach, Johann Sebastian, 251, 276  
 Bach, Wilhelm Friedemann, 261  
 Bakst, Leon, 290  
 Barber, W. H., convict at Norfolk Island, 383  
*Barbiere di Siviglia, Il* (Rossini), 77, 78  
 Barlow, Sam, an old-fashioned Pink or Dianthus, 27  
 Bartolo, Dr., 77  
 Baudelaire, Charles, 3  
*Belle au Bois dormant, La* (Tchaikowsky), 129  
 Bellini, Vincenzo, 128  
 Benares, the burning ghats of, 195-198  
 Berlioz, Hector, 290, 326  
 Blackwater river, the, 96  
 Blake, William, his poem 'The Chimney Sweeper', 324  
 Blasket, the Great, 110  
 Boccaccio, 54  
 Borel, Petrus, French Romantic poet, 322  
 Bosch, Hieronymus, 14, 399-403  
 Bretonne, Restif de la, 90, 91  
 Brueghel, Pieter, 401, 402  
 Bückeburg, building by Dietterlin at, 263  
 Bull, John, Elizabethan composer, 262  
 Buxtehude, old Danish composer, 267-269  
  
 Carey, Anne, mother of Edmund Kean, 313, 314, 320  
 Carey, George Savile, grandfather of Edmund Kean, 313  
*Carnaval*, of Schumann, 88, 89  
 Cashel, the rock of, 115  
*Casse Noisette*, ballet by Tchaikowsky, 280, 281, 291  
 Castile, the Constable of, 390  
*Cenerentola, La* (Rossini), 78  
 Cerfs, Le Parc aux, 213, 214  
 Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, 401  
 Chartreuse, the Grande, 159  
 Chatham, prison mutiny at, 354, 355

# INDEX

- Childs, Major, Governor of Norfolk Island, 384, 387, 388
- Choni, the lamasery of, 111
- Chopin, Frédéric, 81-83
- Clementi, Italian pianist and composer, 79
- Clonmacnoise, monastery of, 108.
- Copenhagen, a street of new shops in, 11
- Coppélia*, ballet by Delibes, 103, 289, 303
- Cortona, Pietro da, Italian architect and painter, 309
- Cranbourn Alley, off Leicester Square, 221, 226
- Crawford, Mr. W., prison reformer, 341-344
- Cruikshank, George, 330, 346, 378
- Cruikshank, Robert, 330, 331
- Cygnés, Le Lac des*, ballet by Tchaikowsky, 126-131, 311
- Culdees, the, Irish monks, 108
- Dali, Salvador, Catalan Surrealist painter, 13
- Dandini, Baron, from *La Cenerentola*, 77
- Dangan, Dr., an old-fashioned Pink or Dianthus, 27
- Daumier, Honoré, *Le Galop Final* of, 178
- Deburau, Gaspard, the Pierrot, 88
- Decker, Paulus the Elder, 264
- Delacroix, 82, 322, 328
- Delibes, Leo, 128, 289
- Deslys, Gaby, 215
- Deverell, Pre-Raphaelite painter, 226
- Diaghilew, Serge de, 327
- Dietterlin, Wendel, German Renaissance architect, 263
- Dingle peninsula, the, 108
- Dinka, a Sudan tribe, 113
- Dinkelsbühl, 274
- Doré, Gustave, 350
- Dormeuse de Naples, La*, lost picture by Ingres, 300
- Dostoevsky, 4
- Dubarry, Madame, 214-217
- Dun Aengus, cyclopean fortress in Aran, 109
- l'Embarquement pour la Cythère* (Watteau), 75, 261
- Escorial, 14
- Falkirk, the weavers of, growers of the Exhibition Pink, 27
- Fantasiestücke* of Schumann, 85
- Field, John, Irish composer, 79-82
- Forkel, biographer of J. S. Bach, 255
- Frederick the Great, grenadiers of, 20
- Frederick the Great and J. S. Bach, 260
- Fuchsias, 27
- Gainsborough, his portrait of Garrick, 321
- Galop Final* of Daumier, 178
- Gallerus, oratory of, in Dingle peninsula, 109
- Ganges, the, 195-198
- Gardena, Val de, in the Dolomites, 24
- Gavarni, the *travestissements* of, in *La Mode*, 102-104, 165-177
- Gazza Ladra, La* (Rossini), 78
- Gillot, Claude, the master of Watteau, 72

# INDEX

- Giordano, Luca, painted ceilings  
by, 309  
Gluck, Elysian Fields of, 302  
Gogh, Vincent Van, 350  
Goldberg, chamber virtuoso to  
Count Kayserling, 255  
Goslar, 274  
Greenacre, murderer, 325, 326  
Greenaway, Kate, 291  
Grimaldi, clown, 330  
Guevara, Don Diego de, 400  
Guevara, Don Nino de, 400  
Guys, Constantin, 3
- High Island, off the coast of  
Connemara, 110  
Hildesheim, 274  
Hogarth, *Gin Lane* of, 41, 360  
Howitt, Mary, account of the  
Pre-Raphaelites in her  
diary, 242  
Hoxton prints, 27  
Hsüan-tsang, Chinese pilgrim to  
India in seventh century,  
192  
Hughes, Arthur, Pre-Raphaelite  
painter, 237  
Hunt, Holman, Pre-Raphaelite  
painter, 13
- Inchmery, an old-fashioned Pink  
or Dianthus, 27  
Indians, Red, 147  
Ingres, J. D., lost picture by,  
300  
Iona, 110
- Janissaries, the revolt of the, 389  
Josephine, the Empress, 175
- Karakorum, 112  
Kayserling, Count, 254  
Kean, Edmund, 313-336  
Kean, Henry, son of Edmund, 318  
Kitzbühel, 21, 22  
Knockmealdown Mountains,  
115  
Lancashire, the Auricula grow-  
ers of, 26, 27  
Lane, Lupino, his autobio-  
graphy, 321, 322  
Lane, Mrs. Sarah, 322  
Leap Castle, 97-100, 328  
Le Blond, his print of Louis  
XV, 213  
Leno, Dan, comedian, 321  
Lewis, J. F., painter, 237  
Lewis, 'Monk', 322, 328, 329  
Lindisfarne, 110  
Lofer, 21, 22  
Louis XV, 211-214  
Lübeck, the Marienkirche at,  
266
- Macarius, Archbishop of An-  
tioch, 204  
Macclesfield, weavers of, grow-  
ers of gold and silver laced  
, , Polyanthus, 27  
Maconochie, Captain, Governor  
of Norfolk Island, 380  
Macquarie, Port, Tasmanian  
penal settlement, 374, 375  
Magadha, 189  
Manchester, weavers of, grow-  
ers of gold and silver laced  
Polyanthus, 27  
Maori, the, 146, 151  
Martin, 'Mad', 264  
Massine, Léonide, choreographer,  
287  
McChuskey, warder at Norfolk  
Island, 381, 390, 391  
Méhul, French composer, 290  
Mencken, Ada, circus rider, 225

# INDEX

- Middleton, Lancashire, weavers  
     of, growers of the Exhibition Pink, 27  
 Millais, J. F., the *Blind Girl* of,  
     237; *Ophelia* of, 243  
 Millbank Prison, 344, 345  
 Miró, Joan, the Catalan Surreal-  
     ist painter, 13, 14  
 Mittenwald, 21, 22  
 Moa, the, 150-152  
 Modica, 7  
 Mozart, 74  
 Mudie, 361, 366, 367  
 Murat, Joachim, King of Naples,  
     300  
  
 Nalanda, 189  
 Nara, the Shoso-in of, 202  
 Nihil, Rev. Daniel, prison chap-  
     lain, 344, 349  
 Nijinska in *La Belle au Bois dor-  
     mant*, 281  
 Nijinski in *Le Lac des Cygnes*,  
     126, 127  
 Nilotes, the giant, 113  
 Norfolk Island, 379-391  
 Noto, 7  
 Noverre, dancer and chore-  
     ographer, 314  
*Nozze di Figaro*, the 'letter-song'  
     from, 74  
  
 Offenbach, Jules, 306  
 Ovid, describes the Scythian  
     horsemen at Tomi, 20  
  
 Paderewski, Ignaz Jan, resemb-  
     lance to Swinburne, 246  
 Paiva, La, 215  
 Patterson, Elizabeth, wife of  
     Jérôme Bonaparte, 175  
 Pearce, the monster, Australian  
     convict, 367-369  
  
 Pearl, Cora, 215  
 Pentonville Prison, 344, 345  
 Petipa, Marius, choreographer,  
     292, 293  
 Philip II of Spain, 14, 400, 401  
 Philip Island, near Norfolk Is-  
     land, 379, 380  
 Picasso, Pablo, 10-12  
 Pierrot Lunaire, of Schönberg,  
     11  
 Pink, the old Exhibition, 27  
 Piranese, the 'Carcere' of, 345  
 Poe, Edgar Allan, 248, 265  
 Polyanthus, gold and silver  
     laced, 27  
 Potsdam, Sanssouci Palace at,  
     260, 261  
 Prado, picture gallery at Mad-  
     rid, 14  
 Primroses, old Irish varieties of,  
     26  
 Price, Mr. John, Governor of  
     Norfolk Island, 384  
 Puer, Point, Tasmanian juvenile  
     penal settlement, 375-378  
  
 Quantz, Johann Jacob, flute  
     composer to Frederick the  
     Great, 261  
 Quincey, Thomas de, 79, 321  
  
 Ragusa, 7  
 Ravel, Maurice, 13  
 Reading Gaol, 355  
 Rock, Dr. Joseph F., of the  
     Arnold Arboretum, 111  
 Rops, Félicien, 215  
 Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, 226-250  
 Rossini, Gioacchino, 76-78  
 Rousseau, Jean Jacques, 16  
  
 Sablonnière, La, restaurant in  
     Leicester Square, 221-250

# INDEX

- Sade, Marquis de, 239  
 St. Petersburg, 80, 128  
 Salzkammergut, lakes of the, 24  
 Sanssouci Palace at Potsdam, 260, 261  
 Scarborough, pierrots' booths at, 61  
 Schuebler, Johann Jacob, 264-266  
 Schumann, Clara, 85  
 Schumann, Robert, 83-85  
 Scott, William Bell, Rossetti stays with, in Scotland, 249  
 Sharaku, Japanese designer of theatrical prints, 331  
 Shilluk, a Sudan tribe, 113  
 Siddal, Miss Elizabeth, 225-250, 325  
 Six, *Les*, modern French composers, 13  
 Skellig, the Great, 109, 110, 114, 115  
 Slieve Bloom Mountains, the, 97  
 Spenser writes the *Faerie Queene* at Kilcolman, 116  
 Spontini, Italian composer, 289  
 Stravinsky, Igor, 12  
 Sweelinck, early Dutch composer, 267  
 Swift, Dean, on deaf servants, 253, 254  
 Swinburne, Algernon Charles, 225-250  
 Tana, Lake, in Abyssinia, 113  
 Tchaikowsky, *La Belle au Bois dormant*, 129, 291  
 Tchaikowsky, *Casse Noisette*, 280, 281, 291  
 Tchaikowsky, *Le Lac des Cygnes*, 126-331, 289  
 Tchaikowsky, *Scherzo of Fourth Symphony*, 131, 132  
 Tchaikowsky, *Hamlet, Francesca da Rimini, Romeo and Juliet*, 286, 290  
 Teach Molaise, in Sligo Bay, 110  
 Therry, Sir Richard, 361, 362  
 Thompson, Hugh, 291  
 Tidswell, Miss, actress at Drury Lane, 315  
 Tiepolo, G. B., his painted stairway at Würzburg, 284, 309  
 Tipperary, the plain of, 115  
 Tompion, Thomas, the clock-maker of Fleet Street, 252, 253  
 Tóry Island, off Donegal, 110  
 Tulip fanciers, 27  
 Tyneside, the Pink fanciers of, 27  
 Ullathorne, Archbishop, 382-384  
 Verlaine, Paul, 4  
 Veronese, Paolo, *The Rape of Europa*, 75  
 Vivaldi, Venetian composer, 269  
 Voltaire at Potsdam, 261  
 Worarlberg, 24  
 War cloaks of the Maori, 149  
 Watteau, Antoine, 66-76, 261  
 Webb, H. J., his theatrical printshop in Hoxton, 326  
 Wey, Francis, his book on London, 322  
 Wilde, Oscar, in Reading Gaol, 355  
 Yeats, W. B., 237  
 Zamor, negro page to Madame Dubarry, 216  
 Zoffany, his portrait of Doctor Johnson, 321